University of Alberta

Making music, re-making leisure in The Beat of Boyle Street

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy*

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2005

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The whole problem can be stated quite simply by asking, 'is there a meaning to music?' My answer would be, 'Yes.' And 'Can you state in so many words what the meaning is?' My answer to that would be, 'No.'

– Aaron Copland

Leisure studies, I contend, is not so much about the examination of integrally constituted physical space or 'natural' segmented time and 'free' experience. Rather it is about what freedom, choice, flexibility, and satisfaction mean in relation to... social formations.

– Chris Rojek,
Decentring Leisure (1995, p. 1)

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandfather, David R. Wilson,
the first and finest scholar I have ever known.

Abstract

This dissertation represents my doctoral research in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, a recreation project that taught young people (ages 14-20) attending an inner city charter school to make their own music using computers and audio production software. The five papers and my research proposal are written to stand alone, but are commonly connected across theoretical, methodological, and analytical issues related to "doing" popular culture in musical leisure contexts with young people. The first paper presents methodological considerations for conducting and constructing an ethnographic bricolage, mixing various theoretical perspectives and methods as necessary in relation to popular culture, music, and leisure. I describe these processes through the hip-hop musical metaphor of "remixology." The second paper offers a "performance text" as an alternative form of authoring ethnographic research. The "album tracks" retold as performance text articulate my struggles to develop a satisfactory means of representing the research—simultaneously musical, poetic, narrative, and performative—and reporting on the processes of the study. These processes included producing and sharing music in order to build rapport and respectful relationships, valuing participants' musical interests, and including young people's perceptions in the research. The third paper considers narrative soundscape compositions that indicate how young people politically use and negotiate city spaces, popular culture, and identities, thus acting as cultural "border crossers" in their everyday lives. The fourth paper provides autoethnographic accounts (with Karen Fox) which question how we have listened to different voices of young people involved in the research and reflect on the presence of our own voices and listening practices in our engagements. While listening to the stories told through rap music is vital, we

emphasize that research/practice dialogue is a *co-production* between performers and active listeners. Our narratives represent ways we have struggled with what is (dis)missed in leisure research/practice, particularly when leisure meanings seem different, dangerous, violent, or otherwise "deviant." In the concluding paper, I (re)locate key relationships between leisure and popular culture, advocating movements toward a "cultural studies of leisure" in order to better understand relations between power, identity work, and cultural consumption and production in youth musical leisure contexts.

Acknowledgements

Among the many insights learned in the course of my three years making music with young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, perhaps the greatest was the importance of giving thanks. Their music, stories, and creativity which have enriched my life, and for these gifts I am most thankful. Many thanks to The Remixologist (Tha Man!), LiGhTsWiTcH, Jazzy-G, Kree-Azn, Ed Mile, Lunacee, Patches, Jellybean, Ironlungz, Noizez, Rasta P, West Side Princess, MC PA, and Novakane—among many others—for sharing your music and your stories with me.

My research with *The Beat of Boyle Street* would not have been possible without the amazing support and input from the teachers and staff at Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC). You have been incredible colleagues and supporters of my work throughout the project. Thanks to Shirley Allan, Shirley Minard, Hope Hunter, Cliff Whitford, Jozef Mihok, and the Boyle Street Education Centre School Board. Particular gratitude goes to Shirley Allan for coordinating all my efforts through the school.

Thanks go to the National Crime Prevention Strategy, Community Mobilization Program grants for their support and funding of *The Beat of Boyle Street*.

Heartfelt thanks to my committee—Karen Fox, Julia Ellis, Jennifer Kelly, Laurie Radford, and Lisa McDermott—thank you all for your insights, ideas, time, continual support and encouragement. Extra thanks to Greg Dimitriadis (SUNY Buffalo) for his support and comments as external reviewer. Special gratitude goes to my advisor Karen Fox, for opening so many doors for me, for your irrepressible wonder and curiosity, and for making spaces for people that don't easily fit in.

Several colleagues at the University of Alberta provided invaluable support, shared ideas, and much-needed breaks from the work. Special thanks go to Rod Murray; Cathy van Ingen; the folks in the "Green Room:" Sean Ryan, Bruce Erickson, Sheila Campbell, Chelsea McLeod, Phil Mullins, Aggie Weighill, Hui-Shin Ngiam; and the "Socio-Cultural Room": Rebecca Lock, Michelle Helstein, Mike Cantelon, and Audrey Giles. Thanks to Diane Leard for the many chats and for being such a great co-author.

My family has been incredible throughout my years in the "north"—you know how much you all mean to me.

Sincerest thanks to "the professor," Joe Minadeo, for teaching me the magic of audio production all of those years ago in Kent, Ohio.

Last, thank you Debra, for being such a wonderful partner, best friend, colleague, and inspiration, and for all your warmth and sunshine in Edmonton's extremely dark and cold wintery-ness.

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Making music, re-making leisure: The Beat of Boyle Street

Brett D. Lashua

Research Proposal

Making music, re-making leisure: The Beat of Boyle Street

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song"
– Maya Angelou

Fade In—Introduction

[CD track 1] *We're walking slowly and recording city sounds along 101st Street, in the centre of downtown, on our way to Churchill subway station when "MC Ed Mile" breaks into a freestyle rap: "I'm walking down one-oh-one, freestyling, going buck wild," then stumbling to find some rhyming phrases, he adds "I'm kinda thinking dumb, but that's okay 'cause I'm in the middle of the inner-city slum! What are we gonna do? We're going to, like, roll to the beat of an invisible drum." We scribble down keywords about things around us—"writing rhymes on loose-leaf lines" MC Ed Mile says—scratching with a pencil in a notebook: "Businessmen with cell phones look at us funny" and then "buses rumble." Traffic, footsteps, subway trains, speech, city rhythms: These are our "invisible" drums.*

MC Ed Mile reads nearly every sign, and checks out every car, incorporating the words and images into his rhyming rap as we amble along: "that's me a 6'3" treaty Cree in the goatee, pants saggin' and draggin', looking like the rear end of a Ford station wagon." His trousers are so baggy I worry they could fall off at any second, and he's rolled one pant leg up to his knee. He also wears an oversized Chicago Bulls jersey, called a "throwback" because it hangs so loose, and tops off his hip-hop gear with an Atlanta Braves baseball cap, twisted sideways. As an urban Aboriginal youth, he senses racism, at certain

times "because of my clothing, how I'm walking, how I'm talking." He slips into rhyme: "I wear funny clothes, I hit you with low blows, I got mad flows." Sometimes, he adds, people stereotype him because of the color of his skin. "The color of my skin?" he asks, "at times its like, its like, 'cause they see a Native guy they think I'm gonna ask them for money. Like, I had this stereotype just a couple days ago. I was walking down the street, and went up to ask this lady a question. I was like, 'um, I was wondering if you could help me out?' and she was like 'no no, I got nothing!' and I'm like 'hold on man, you never even listened to the question yet.'"

Who is listening to Ed Mile and other young people like him? What does he have to ask and to tell us? How do his rhyming lyrical stories act as representations of how he uses hip-hop as a recreational practice to construct what it means to him to be young, Native, and alive in Edmonton?

We loop through the underground pedways that link the City Centre Mall to the subway stations, loudly yelling "tribal riders" to capture our echoing voices, as the words reverberate and then ghostly fade away...

The urban soundscape is musical, polyphonic, dissonant, and rhythmic, and as they struggle to live in it young Aboriginal people articulate their experiences in poetic ways that express the political realities that they navigate in their everyday lives. This proposal presents/represents the stories and voices of youth like Ed Mile, living in the city, involved in *The Beat of Boyle Street*—a recreation project in which I teach young people to use computers and audio software to make, produce, and record their own music. Ed Mile's raps begin to raise and address the questions of why this project is

valuable to young people, as well as important to people who work with youth. Engaging with young people's musical practices and experiences offers opportunities for the expansion of our understandings of the worlds they inhabit, worlds in which we may share and support them. In *The Beat of Boyle Street* we ask and listen to the questions that trouble, inspire and help us to make sense of the realities of our lives: How do we understand who we are and who we may become through the shared process of making music?

The Beat of Boyle Street demonstrates the importance of paying attention to popular culture, particularly rap/hip-hop music, and what young people are actually *doing* with it. They take popular culture seriously, and express their cultural identities—that is, their sense of self in relation to others—through popular cultural music, language, and style. Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) argue that

> most of the struggles over social justice are about the domination, slicing, oppression, and marginalization of specific identity groups. Identity thus has much to do with power (either empowerment or disempowerment) and with learning how to position oneself within historic struggles over power. (p. 12)

Hip-hop is a way that many young people "learn how to position" themselves, as well as contest how they have been positioned, within struggles over power. The young urban Aboriginal people I have met through *The Beat of Boyle Street* are confronted with problems of homelessness, poverty, crime, violence, drug use and addictions, poor parenting and teen parenting issues, learning disabilities, discrimination and racism, and

the vicissitudes of "life on the streets". MC Novakane, evocatively expresses these struggles in his rap, "My Natives" **[CD Track 2]**:

This is for my Natives...

My players, my Natives...

Someone get me off of this shit...

My heartbeat's a scream, to know this is just a dream

The teardrop's my eye, the weed helps me fly

Mama always told that life brings the wild

I can't stop thinking: will I ever hold a child?

Got homeys in the cage always counting the days

Burn a little sage to complete my prayers

To be honest with the truth, I wanna help the youth

The reservation like a 'hood, my rhymes are me and you

Why am I drinking, always thinking: What's wrong?

Givin' a little a heart and keepin' myself strong,

In my mind I'm a chief, for real I got some beats,

I wanted to be the man to knock out Custer's teeth.

Give me a holler I'll show the world I care,

From redskins to black get me off this welfare,

Creator all I ask is embrace me with a hug,

To my people from me to you, would you pray for a thug?

So let me say this once, to death I'm a soldier,

Hold back my pocketbook, the world's getting colder,

For real, Native, listen to what I told ya,

For any Native ladies dressing babies let me hold ya.

Right and wrong, is 24/7,

And if I die, and which I will, it stays in heaven,

So all I really know is: Are you down with me?

Give me your hand, and I'll be taking back this land,

Yeah, my Natives... uh uh uh, my Natives... my Natives...

Come on... my Natives.

Novakane's rap is an evocation of how he experiences and interprets the world around him. It is a powerfully creative act, as well as a call to action. Music can thus be a site of empowering youth. Rap and hip-hop music have become powerful sites where young people negotiate, resist, embrace and "play" with popular culture and identity. *The Beat of Boyle Street* is one such location where this is occurring.

Verse 1—The Beat of Boyle Street

In her book *Outlaw Culture* (1994), bell hooks claimed that "talking critically about popular culture [is] a powerful way to share knowledge, in and outside the academy, across differences, in an oppositional way" (p. 4). She added that "cultural studies that looks at popular culture has the power to move intellectuals out of the academy and into the street." The "street" in this project is Boyle Street, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Edmonton. *The Beat of Boyle Street* is a collaboration between the University of Alberta and the Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC). The Education Centre is an inner city charter school that seeks to re-engage "at-risk," predominantly Aboriginal youth, ages 14 to 20, who have had difficulty in other schools.

The Boyle Street community is one neighborhood among an area of seven "fringe" communities that border the northern edge of downtown. Students who live in these areas have not had easy lives. Few live with both parents, some are living in group homes, some are living independently, and more than a handful have experienced homelessness. Most students are living in severe poverty. These youth struggle with effects from poor parenting, abandonment, growing up in foster care, or being raised by relatives other than parents. Teen parenting is another issue, as some students have had children as young as at age 14. They have struggled with education, and on average, students have attended seven different schools before coming to BSEC. Additionally, many students are working through learning difficulties or disabilities such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Additionally, more than a few students are using or addicted to alcohol and drugs as early as age 14. Many have been in jail or repeated trouble with the police. Over 65% report that they have been arrested or have had repeated trouble with the police. As Aboriginal youth (90% of students report Aboriginal heritage), they are familiar with the subtle yet pervasive effects of discrimination and racism. Consequently, they are angry, depressed, suicidal, living on the streets or in abject poverty, addicted to crack cocaine or blackout drinkers as early as age fifteen, stealing cars, fighting, or getting arrested. One student, LiGhTsWitCh, created a spoken-word/rap that expresses these realities, *"Broken Home"* **[CD Track 3]**:

Broken home full of anger and pain

Full of bruises and cuts and beer and such

Full of suicidal thoughts and murderous minds

Full of drugs and slaps and punches thrown

Full of greed and hurt and full of unknown sitters

And misunderstanding shit

Full of rape and no freedom to get away

Full of dishonesty and mistrust

Full of racism and hate

Full of screams and shouts and "get the hell out's"

Full of sex and loud music and parties every night

Then suddenly, its over, it all comes to an end...

When the littlest one pulls a gun to her head.

This song evokes the difficult and frequently devastating circumstances that challenge youth. Yet, the young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street* still struggle to hold onto hope, their cultural strengths, and dreams for enjoying life. For many students such as LiGhTsWiTcH, music is a passion and *The Beat of Boyle Street* acts in a variety of ways to support and affirm the place and value of leisure and popular culture in their lives. First, the project provides a consistent and stable time and space in their days for recreation—making and sharing the processes of music. All too often the young people who attend the school have few opportunities to participate in creative recreational activities. More often than not, they have told me that they generally have "nothing to do." Second, as a leisure activity, the project adds to the small successes in life that generate and support hope: acts of creativity, constructive expressions of anger, sharing sadness, bringing up "the issues" through songs and discussions. The project allows young people the conditions of choice to use the space—our music room in the Education

Centre—to create some beats, play with sounds, talk about what musical artists students like (and why) with me and their peers, or just chill out and listen to music. Overall, this makes coming to school a more positive experience, a point of particular importance for youth who have not typically had success in school. Third, the project provides new skills (with computers, software, and audio equipment) while valuing the ones (in life) the students already possess. For example, students who have difficulty reading and remembering written text can nevertheless create freestyle rhymes rich in vocabulary and rap extemporaneously with ease. Last, *The Beat of Boyle Street* acts as an intervention in the field of representation that offers new and exciting opportunities to dialogue with and listen to the voices of these young people. In *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (1999), Tuhiwai Smith argues that:

> Indigenous communities have struggled since colonization to be able to exercise what is viewed as a fundamental right, that is to represent ourselves. The representing project spans both the notion of representation as political concept and representation as a form of voice and expression.... Representation is also a project of indigenous artists, writers, poets, film makers and others who attempt to express an indigenous spirit, experience, or worldview. Representation of indigenous peoples by indigenous people is about countering the dominant society's images about indigenous peoples, their lifestyles, and belief systems. (p. 150-151)

Thus, the opportunity to dialogue with young Native people about music and pop cultural representations presents an exciting opportunity for researchers to learn about the diverse

cultural textures of leisure and music. Fine (1998) refers to this dialogue as part of "working the hyphen" in the self-other relationship. Working the hyphen is a crucial event in ethnographic research that questions:

> how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are multiple in those relations... [working the hyphen] means creating occasions to discuss what is and what is not 'happening between', within the negotiated relations of *whose* story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence. (p. 135)

Working the hyphens opens up a number of possibilities in the processes of representation, and in the "negotiated relations" of making music in *The Beat of Boyle Street*. Working the hyphens allows me to enter into the shared space of the "dance" of life with young people (Janesick, 1998). If social justice is a value to researchers, the only way to "understand and know the subtlety of racism [and other forms of oppression] is to interact and listen carefully to people of color who are sensitive to the nuances" (Fox, 1995, p. 180). Thus, working the hyphens as a researcher-teacher-collaborator in *The Beat of Boyle Street* requires that I am present, in the project's place, to listen to young people's music and the stories they tell about the places of their lives through it. The proposed research is as much about me as it is about the young people at Boyle Street Education Centre, as I bring my own values, experiences, and assumptions to the project. Research is a process through which the researcher is transformed (Ellis, 1998). After my first day at the school, I wrote in my journal:

> *Brett's Journal, September 10, 2002: I bolted out of the doors, running the gauntlet of the people hanging out and smoking in front of the Co-Op. I do not understand this place; it is like another planet to me. I do not understand what draws them here, these "kids" that have fought, failed, and been kicked out of every other school in Edmonton. I don't know what it means to be Native to them. I don't know what the school expects of me, and they seem to have handed me their toughest cases. All I know is that I can teach them to make music with the computers, if we can negotiate a way to do it. Yet already I am amazed at what they have to say, how vocal they are about what their lives have been like, and how determined they seem to be to resist everything: Fuck this and fuck that and fuck you! Yet they are there, in the school, and I wonder what gives them hope, and what do they want from life?*

This proposal is at heart a treatise on "negotiating a way to do" *The Beat of Boyle Street*. The process of working the hyphen opens up questions of representational poetics and politics, the "negotiated relations" of telling stories and situating those stories within social and political contexts. In *The Beat of Boyle Street* young people make musical compositions that tell part of their stories and experiences, providing a musically poetic window into the ways they interpret themselves and their realities. These songs illustrate the importance of what they actually do with popular culture, particularly rap/hip-hop music, in their day-to-day lives. Turner (1996) suggests that the value of popular culture is deeply embedded in the tensions that occur within popular culture:

> Popular culture is a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined. The point of doing this is not only academic—that is, as an

> attempt to understand a process or practice—it is also political, to examine the power relations that constitute this form of everyday life and thus reveal the configurations of interests its construction serves. (p. 6)

For Turner, popular culture is a process, a process of making meaning and making contexts. In *The Beat of Boyle Street* the context is music. However, little research has been conducted around rap music and its uses in the everyday lives of young people (Dimitriadis, 2001a), and even less about rap and Aboriginal youth (Krims, 2000). To date, no work has taken up these issues in terms of experiences produced through leisure. Hence, the proposed ethnography about *The Beat of Boyle Street* is a unique and necessary "remix" of leisure, music, and pop cultural studies, read through compositions, raps, spoken-word poems, remixes, discussions and stories told by these young people. My reflections, journal notes, anecdotes, and musical contributions are mixed in as well. Thus the project offers a rich, complex context to touch and connect with the lives of young people while opening up possibilities for new directions in leisure research and practice.

I've structured my research plan in the following ways to frame the project: I've begun with an introduction that highlights my curiosity and describes some of the issues that my research seeks to address. What follows is a discussion of some theoretical orientations regarding popular culture, leisure, and issues of identity and representation. A third section outlines the methodological considerations and processes for doing ethnographic research. Subsequently, a framework for analysis is offered describing how I will interpret, organize and present the project through the concepts of borderlands and border crossings. As a musician, I've always been partial to compositions that fade in and

out (and thus avoid neat, abrupt beginnings and endings), so I've attempted to accomplish this in text through segments that taper in and out. Finally, since this proposal is about ways of making music, I've offered a short "coda"—in music, a passage that serves to round out, conclude or summarize a composition, yet has its own interest.

Verse 2—Doing popular culture, doing leisure

Popular culture is a powerful and complex site for the exploration of leisure. The young people participating in *The Beat of Boyle Street* make substantial investments in music and popular culture as expressions of their identities and social relationships. The project builds upon this base by teaching young people how to produce their own music using computers and audio software. Leisure in this context is a powerful site in which participants have the freedom and creative space to express their hopes, dreams, frustrations, and experiences of the world in their own voices. In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, making music is a recreational activity that young people *do*.

This "doing" is important for a number of reasons. First, songs act as types of narratives created by young people that are expressive of the ways that they understand themselves and their place in the world around them. Narratives allow youth "to tell their life stories. Opportunities need to be provided for them to convey what they are saying, or not saying, about leisure in general and leisure as a context for identity formation" (Kivel, 1997, p. 34). Identity construction is key here, and the intersection between constructs of identity and popular culture is a site of tensions that occur as young people resist, embrace, and negotiate issues of race, class, age, ability, sex, and gender. My aim

in this research is to illustrate critical connections between the politics of identity and the ways that youth use popular culture.

Second, by adopting a cultural studies approach, this research study seeks to understand the poetics and the politics of hip-hop music; that is, what young people's songs "say" (poetics) about their experiences as representational texts and, more importantly, the power relations that shape the lived practices in which hip-hop music is created (politics). Hall (1997) provides a useful explanation of the terms, *poetics* and *politics*. Poetics, notes Hall, are "the internal articulation and production of meaning" (1997, p. 184) through language (such as signs, objects, concepts, '*things*'). More simply put, poetics refer to how meaning is constructed and produced through relationships in representational texts. In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, for example, rap lyrics, hip-hop clothing and style, or a selection of songs collected for a compilation CD have poetic qualities and meaning. These components convey particular constructions and relationships among meanings of urban Aboriginal youth experiences.

The concept of politics, according to Hall (1997), refers to the role of representational practices "in the production of social knowledge" (p. 185) and attends to broader issues of knowledge and power. The processes involved in writing lyrics or making a hip-hop beat, for instance, are "historical, social, and political events" (Hall, 1997, p. 185) and do not simply "happen." Analyzing particular contexts (e.g., a recreational music program in an inner-city charter school) opens critical space to argue that the practices of music making and performance are powerful social and political activities. Leisure/musical practices are *both* made to signify through poetic representation *and* inscribed with relations of power. Poetics and politics are useful

concepts to better understand cultural processes and, adds Hall (1997), "especially those [poetics and politics] which prevail between the people who are represented and the cultures and institutions doing the representing" (p. 225).

A poetic and political approach to researching representational meanings and practices focuses attention upon the act of *making* and *using* music in everyday practices (i.e., "doing" hip-hop). Too often research has ignored the lived experiences of youth, focusing on what popular culture does to young people rather than what young people make and do with it (Bennett, 2000; Chu, 1997; Dimitriadis, 2001a; Sweetman; 2001). Making music provides youth with new ways to express their values and share their anger, joy, frustration, hope and sorrow. The songs and compositions that young people create focus attention on the ways they negotiate various kinds of social injustices, such as racism, poverty, and discrimination they encounter in their daily lives. Their music also articulates a celebration of survival, a playfulness toward popular culture and the artful creation of happiness, fun, and a sense of belonging fashioned out of the cultural "raw materials" available to them (Giroux, 1992).

The music created by the students in *The Beat of Boyle Street* provides insights into the notoriously messy relationships between the everyday experiences of young people and popular culture. Fiske (1989) describes popular culture as

> deeply contradictory in societies where power is unequally distributed along axes of class, gender, race, and the other categories that we use to make sense of our social differences. Popular culture is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that

> are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience. Equally, it shows signs of resisting or evading these forces: Popular culture contradicts itself. (Fiske, 1989, p. 4-5)

Popular culture contains a plurality of meanings that enable actors "to partake of both of its forces simultaneously and devolves to them the power to situate themselves within this play of forces at the point that meets their particular cultural interests" (Fiske, 1989, p. 5). Hence, rather than holding a single, fixed meaning, popular culture serves as a bank of resources from which young people may actively choose, appropriating from cultural raw materials to use in specific ways in their day-to-day lives (Sweetman, 2001). Youth appropriate and use popular culture in ways that often embrace and challenge prevailing power relations. One primary site of appropriation is the consumption of music.

Frith (1983) noted that there was no such thing as the passive consumption of music. According to Frith, Willis (1990) and de Certeau (1984) consumption is a symbolically creative, artistic activity. For de Certeau (1984), the everyday practices of life involve people's use of cultural "stuff" (music, food, city spaces, etc) that shifts meaning in new, creative, and meaningful ways. He refers to these creative uses as "tactics." Tactics are ways of consuming/using/doing things in ways that resist or confound the strategies intended in their production purposes. de Certeau (1984) conceives of tactics as small everyday practices (e.g., talking, walking, shopping, cooking) that belong to the other/the weak that allow for victories over the more powerful: "these procedures and ruses of consumers compose a network of anti-discipline" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xv). Tactics operate as important processes that allow

people to make and remake popular cultural artifacts such as films, music, clothes, and recreation into meaningful aspects of their everyday lives.

Giroux (1994a) adds that "popular culture offers resistance to the notion that useful culture can only be produced within dominant regimes of power" (Framing Youth section, para. 3). Fiske (1989), Giroux (1994a), Willis (2000), and others (see Carlson and Dimitriadis, 2003) argue that popular culture is what people make and re-make from the products of the culture industries. "Mass culture is the repertoire, and popular culture is what people actively make from it and do with it" (Storey, 1997, p. 16). Rojek (2000) refers to the tactics that consumers use as "the capacity to play with the codes of consumption and subvert them" (p. 47). Willis (1990) also described tactical practices of young people, subverting the music industry by taping music from the radio for free. In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, computers and technology are tactical areas in young people's practices of producing and consuming music, as they download, remix, sample from music files, and create their own CDs. Tactical practices—as subversive, as resistance—are a central point for research, as "the study of popular culture requires the study not only of the cultural commodities out of which it is made, but also of the ways that people use them. The latter are far more creative and varied than the former" (Fiske, 1989, p. 15). Young people's practices in relationship to popular culture are, at best, paradoxical, and at worst, extremely messy. For instance, if a young Aboriginal student wears an Atlanta Braves baseball jersey, as a part of her hip-hop style, how does one know if this is a type of "subversive" reclaiming of Native sport mascots or an example of further commodification and incorporation of Aboriginal youth? This project seeks to create a space where a dialogue could be engaged with young people about such issues.

The importance of what young people do with "the popular" emerges from critiques of semiotic approaches to studying popular culture. Semiotic analyses (particularly of music) have been criticized for placing too much emphasis on texts and thus moving young people themselves and their "messy and unpredictable relationship to and with popular texts" (Dimitriadis, 2001a, p. 30) into the background. Textual analyses often view young people as passive receptors of popular culture, easily corrupted and controlled within strategies of production, and in need of defensive protection from its negative effects (i.e., listening to gangsta rap will turn young people into gangsters). Ballinger (1995) writes that textual approaches to studying music are "particularly problematic with forms of music that are heavily coded (possibly to avoid censure), or where lyrics are of secondary importance or even misleading[1]" (p.17).

As a counterargument, Ballinger (1995), Bennett (2002, 2000), Chu (1997), Dimitriadis (2001a), Fiske (1989), Sweetman (2001), and Willis (1990) support work that is "celebratory, validating the kind of creativity and effort that young people invest in the non-elite arts" (Dimitriadis, 2001a, p. 30). In her work with youth and fanzines, Chu (1997) notes that much of this work "emphasizes a framework for involving youth in extant projects and social movements. My research ultimately attempts to go a step beyond involving youth by asking how we can involve ourselves in the projects young people are initiating on their own" (p. 82). *The Beat of Boyle Street* starts from the investment that young people have already made in popular music, dance, and dress. As recreation, the project allows youth the space to create music in an atmosphere that values and supports the gifts, talents, and experience that they bring to the project.

Additionally, recreational music production allows the young people in the project to make choices for themselves, produce their own music, include their own voices and create aural representations of *themselves*. Recreation provides a meaningful vehicle for connecting them to the education centre (i.e., they look forward to attending school to do music at least one period a day), as well as for connecting adults to *their* lives. For ease of use here, I define "recreation" to include the freely chosen and intrinsically satisfying aspects involved in the processes of creating, sharing, and using music. However, recreation has both individual *and* social effects and consequences, and it is with these effects that I am most interested, particularly in regard to the performative aspects of recreation practices (Rojek, 2000). Rojek (2000) noted that "leisure choices are made for the purposes of identity distinction" and these choices "lay down a marker which distinguishes the individual from the mass" (p. 99). Furthermore, these decisions "should be interpreted as a conscious attempt to transform one's given relationship with the rest of society" (Rojek, 2000, p. 99). Along similar lines, Denzin (2003) points out that as "Stuart Hall reminds us, [popular culture] is mythic, a theatre of desires, a space of popular fantasies. 'It is where we go to discover who we are'" (p. 183). Thus, leisure and recreation practices may operate as a space for youth to explore popular culture and different identities. This is of particular import in locales where youth have been marginalized *because of* different aspects of identity.

Youth marginalized by race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and other markers of the politics of identity "often view school as oppressive sites, and they respond by dropping out of them both explicitly and implicitly in myriad ways" (Carlson and Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 30). These youth turn to other places where they can "engage in

developing affirming identities" (Carlson and Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 30) beyond the walls of schools. Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts (2000) refer to these sites as "free spaces" where young people are "'homesteading'—finding unsuspecting places within their geographic locations, their public institutions, and their spiritual lives to sculpt real and imaginary corners for peace, solace, communion, personal and collective identity work" (p. 132). Although it is housed in a school, and operates as an option class during school hours, *The Beat of Boyle Street* is a recreation-based project that allows students a degree of choices and creative control over their music. The project functions as the type of "free space" that supports young people's investments in different identities and popular culture.

Researchers need to take popular culture and recreation research seriously, to be aware of the investment that young people have made in the non-elite arts, and recognize the way that more traditional frameworks for education and recreation have not worked for some students (Dimitriadis, 2001a; Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts, 2000). Rap/hip-hop music permeates the fabric of young people's places, social lives and identities. Another BSEC student, "fr0lic", describes how she lost interest in art class in her former school, yet created a vibrant "b-girl bible" about hip-hop dance and graffiti culture in her art class notebook **[CD Track 4]**:

> [fr0lic]: I used to go to Vic [a performing arts] school, and it's a black art book that I used for Art IB, which is an advanced art program, and slowly it turned into the bible because I had to make a title page, and the title page had to do with something you liked, and I made b-girling, so, yeah.
>
> [Brett Lashua]: What's b-girling?

[fr0lic]: Breaking, break-girling, to dance breakdance as a girl, b-girl. Yes. Yes yes. So I made a title page, and then I started writing art notes, and then it stopped. And I started graffiting into that.

[Brett Lashua]: So is graffiti more artistic to you than school art?

[fr0lic]: Yes. Graffiti is your own personal expression, like poetry written on a wall. Instead of being told 'do this! Do that!', you do what you want. I don't like guidance very much, nope nope… um, there's related dances and hip-hop culture written down in this book, about the south Bronx. I also have graffiti photos, battle flyers…

[Brett Lashua]: What's a breakdancing battle?

[fr0lic]: It's when either a single person or team of two or more people dances against another person or group of people. And they get judged and whoever wins, wins the battle. Battles were made so that people in the Bronx wouldn't have to shoot each other, they'd dance their fighting problems out… and this is our tickets, well one of them—I don't know where mine is—from when we went to Vancouver. And they were… that was a cheap cheap trip. It was only $400, and we went to Vancouver.

[Brett Lashua]: What did you do in Vancouver?

[fr0lic]: We went to a battle, and we went shopping, and we breakdanced, and met some cool people…

For fr0lic, "art class" lacked relevance to the hip-hop "street" art and culture that carry more value for her than traditional types of art projects do. Fr0lic's "b-girl bible" relates directly to the paradoxical position of recreational opportunities connected with

popular culture. These are sites where a great deal of identity and knowledge formation occurs, yet popular culture is often maligned, misunderstood or undervalued by people other than youth. Rap music and hip-hop culture are powerful forces in young people's lives, and leisure researchers and practitioners need to recognize the importance that youth place upon it[2]. Doing so, I believe, makes recreation programs (e.g., for youth "at risk") and schools (such as BSEC) into more relevant places for youth to be.

Verse 3—Method and methodological considerations

> The impact of the visual is so overwhelming that we sometimes forget that it has been accompanied by a cultural revolution almost as ubiquitous. This is the revolution in *sound.* (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Nagus, 1997, p. 19)

My interest in leisure is in its lived form, that is, not abstracted from its context in cultural relations (Willis, 2000). Leisure research should take popular culture seriously, because most of the music industry, artists, and young people take popular culture seriously. I am concerned with the major analytical orientations of Cultural Studies—the formal analysis of popular texts; the situating of these texts to explore how they are variously read, received and consumed; and observation and analysis of lived cultures, of cultural experience, and the development of ethnographies of everyday practices (Hall, 1980b; Tomlinson, 1999). Krims (2000) pointed out that music theory (or rather, "theory about music", as he would prefer it) has not adequately addressed issues of social, cultural and political power, particularly in terms of identity construction. His work unravels notions of the "poetics" of rap music, that is, how rap music is represented through texts created by producers, artists, media, and fans. The poetics of representation,

Krims adds, "cannot occur in isolation from a responsive audience and often changes in audience articulations. Just *how* the audience responds to (and inflects) the media content is a project that may well await more ethnographic work" (2000, p. 30). I believe *The Beat of Boyle Street* answers this call, which includes a focus on the *politics* of representation—the "how" component Krims designates is implicated in *both* the popular cultural texts that are created *and* the powerful ways in which they are *used*. This use, I will argue, is what is most dramatically revolutionary in "the revolution in sound."

This section of my proposal outlines the methodological considerations that will guide my research, as well as describe the method I employ in the project so that young people may create music and sound files. Specifically, I'm interested in the ways that the "poetics and politics" of music operate in the everyday lives of urban Aboriginal youth. My research will be ethnographic, with examples (samples) of the processes of creating computer music used as a metaphor for interpretative inquiry (Janesick, 1998). I begin with a discussion of the unorthodox methods we employ to create music in *The Beat of Boyle Street*. This is followed by sections that outline how art (Willis, 2000), hypermediated ethnography (Dicks and Mason, 1998), and sampling act as methodological frames for the project.

A brief introduction to computer-generated music

In *The Beat of Boyle Street,* creating music is done in an unconventional way. Rather than "traditional" instruments such as guitars and pianos, we primarily use computers and audio software: sound editors, beat generators, multi-track sequencers, synthesizers, turntables, and portable digital recorders. Using these tools, we create our own sounds, as well as sample from other songs, sounds, and the lived environment

around us. As a result, this project puts the creative, and often tactical, processes and tools for making hip-hop music in young people's hands. These methods for creating music subsequently inform my understanding of how they create popular cultural texts and how they use them in their everyday lives.

In pop music, particularly hip-hop, "sampling" refers to taking a section of a song and copying it out for use in another composition. For example, a sample of drum loop from one song may be copied and used in another song. Sampling is contentious in the ongoing debate about musical authorship and originality (Cutler, 1995; Lipsitz, 1994; Théberge, 1997). Cutler (1995) refers to sampling as "plunderphonics" and claims these practices call into question the notions of propriety and ownership of popular cultural artefacts such as sound recordings. Sampling becomes particularly powerful when the file-sharing capacities of the Internet are mixed in, as literally "any sound you can imagine" (Théberge, 1997) is available via download using file-sharing programs such as "Kazaa". Downloading copyrighted material for free raises more questions about "owning" songs/sounds, and in the context of *The Beat of Boyle Street*, using those sounds as materials to fashion new songs. Lipsitz (1994) argues that young people (particularly rap artists) "know what time it is" and sample as a means of resistance to the dominant systems of production and consumption in the music industry. This is perhaps an overly simplistic view of *why* people use samples (e.g., see de Certeau's (1984) work around tactical consumption). For the moment, it is important to emphasize how sampling has altered the ways that people make, consume, and understand music:

> Music programs [software] have blurred the line between performance, production and creation. They've also influenced the development of

> popular music, by making it easy to produce complex textures and disjunctive effects… More radically, the latest wave of music software has made it possible for people with no musical training or skill on any instrument to create records. Not since the upright piano became an essential item for every middle-class parlour has any device prompted such an explosion of amateur activity. (Everett-Green, *Globe and Mail*, Thursday, March 21, 2002)

This passage partly describes how the "revolution in sound" works in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, as students with very little exposure to making music are able to begin to do so virtually from the moment they open the software, and may create incredibly complex sounds and compositions with only the computers and their imaginations.

In *The Beat of Boyle Street* I teach the BSEC students how to use three primary pieces of audio production software: Sonic Foundry Sound Forge™, Fruity Loops™, and Steinberg Cubase SX™. As the name infers, Sound Forge allows us to make, view, and manipulate audio wave files. For example, I could import a song from a Compact Disc, copy a section from it, add effects to this segment such as echo and distortion, flip it to play backwards and then drop the pitch several tones. The resulting wave file, or sample, would bear as little or as much likeness to the "original" as I preferred. Files may also be mixed together at desired levels (e.g., 75% of Sound A and 25% of Sound B), overlapped, abutted, or crossfaded (Sound A fades out as Sound B fades in). I use Sound Forge as a starting point for playing with audio files, as the user can readily see waveforms on the computer screen and do, undo, and redo production techniques ad infinitum. BSEC students may load their favourite songs into Sound Forge, slice them

into small segments, add effects, and rearrange them in a new order. This would be a simple "remix."

Sound Forge also records audio directly from an input such as a microphone, a keyboard, or turntables. Using a microphone, students may record themselves into Sound Forge reading a poem, or doing a freestyle rap. They produce their "track" by editing out any stumbles in their phrasing, adding effects such as reverb to create ambiance, or mixing in other sounds (e.g., street noises, drum beats). A preferred activity of many students is recording their own voices and mixing these recordings into favourite songs. Thus a song by rapper Tupac Shakur may receive a new spoken introduction by "MC Nate Dogg"—an original creation of a famous rapper and a Boyle Street artiste.

A second piece of production software that I show students how to use is Fruity Loops. This program offers an entire production suite for generating and arranging a dizzying array of preset sounds (external, sampled sounds may also be loaded into it as well). Fruity Loops is at heart a sequencer, allowing the user to control the sounds she wishes to hear at precise points in time. Fruity Loops activates or "triggers" each sound at a given point along a short timeline (e.g., a measure). Whereas Sound Forge simply records and manipulates audio, Fruity Loops *generates* sounds in a highly controllable manner. Therefore, upon opening Fruity Loops, the user only needs to begin "pressing buttons" on the screen that activate the sounds they represent (e.g., a bass drum, a piano, or a synthesizer). In other words, for a measure's timeline consisting of a line of 8 buttons, selecting a "bass drum" for this channel and turning on every button could generate a simple beat. To perhaps explain this in a more aural example, try tapping your foot 8 times—in a sense you have "triggered" the floor to make a "tap" sound of 8 beats.

Fruity Loops works in a similar way, except that layer upon layer of diverse sounds may be added, and the timeline may be expanded from just one measure, to up to 999 measures (if desired!)

Fruity Loops also has the ability to "stretch to fit" a sample to its current time signature. A section of audio may be sampled using Sound Forge (e.g., the first measure of Bizet's *Carmen Suite*), loaded into Fruity Loops, and then stretched to fit the exact length of the measure in Fruity Loops. What this means is that songs at different speeds may be altered (stretched) to fit in time with one another, so long as the samples are cut in cycles that repeat in time (thus, a loop). In this way, a string sample from Bizet's *Carmen Suite* may be mixed with a percussion sample from James Brown (e.g., "funky drummer"—perhaps the most sampled beat in music!). Fruity Loops will allow the user to speed up or slow down the samples until they match. Of course, this alters the pitch and tempo of each sample, which changes the way each sounds. However, this is part of the process of creating something different from what had previously existed before, an artistry that involves choices and thus, politics. **[CD Track 5]**

The third primary piece of software that we use in *The Beat of Boyle Street* is a "virtual studio" called Cubase SX. We primarily use Cubase as a multi-track recorder and mixer. Unlike Sound Forge (which records or plays audio, but cannot do both simultaneously), Cubase will play and record up to 24 tracks of audio simultaneously (so long as the computer can handle that much data!). For example, we may load a drum beat on to track #1, record ourselves playing a keyboard on track #2, and then record rap/vocals on track #3. In practice, I have the students record *multiple* tracks of their voices, and then we "produce" a single composite vocal track by selecting the best lines

and phrases from the lot. Additionally, Cubase has an array of built-in effects, and many features are capable of being automated. This means, for example, that the computer will fade the song out for us, or we can create a swirling effect by automating a frequency sweep across a measure of drum sounds. Once a composition is assembled to the degree that the student is satisfied with it, Cubase will "export" a mixdown of all the tracks into a single audio file. We can then either transfer this mixdown onto a CD, or post it as an mp3 (which are significantly smaller data files) onto the project's website.

The combined effect of using all of this software is not unlike playing with various paints, crayons, chalks, charcoals, or pencils to create a visual picture, except that we are doing it with sound. Music is synesthetic: sounds have textures and colours and *feel*. Distorted sounds possess an abrasive aggression; lush reverb conveys a dreamy ambience. Some beats are imbued with a lazy swing or, conversely, a frantic impulse to move. This meaning does not occur naturally, rather sounds are *made to mean*, often as a result of history, experience, and use. For instance, after mixing a sample from Bizet's *Carmen* with a drum loop from a funky James Brown song, then slowing the audio to a sauntering pace, students erupted in a collective chorus of remarks that the result was "pimpin". This, they explained, meant that it was suitable for cruising slowly in a car on warm summer night with the windows down and the music turned up. In ways such as this, music has the potential to evoke powerful scenes and emotions, intone a variety of social connections, and resonate with contestations and tensions in relationships of power. This latter point was made plain to me as I asked the students if *I* would be "pimpin" if *I* cruised around listening to this composition. "No way!" Again, this point

clearly indicates that meaning is slippery; a song's meaning changes according to where, how, why, and by whom it is used.

Popular cultural theorists such as Bennett (2000), de Certeau (1984), Dimitriadis (2001a), Fiske (1989), Sweetman (2001), and Willis (2000) have argued that young people make and re-make culture through appropriating the cultural "raw materials" of life in order to construct meaning in their own specific cultural localities. In a metaphorical sense, they are "sampling" from broader popular culture and reworking what they take into their own specific local culture. The ways that young people sample drum rhythms and vocal segments from songs may be thought of as analogous to the ways that they sample from culture. They take what they can get, modify or restructure it in some meaningful ways, and rework it into the "compositions" of their own daily lives. Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) added that creative engagement allows disempowered youth "a sense that they are controlling their own representation, that they are in control of their own cultural identity, and are creatively shaping and molding language, style, and self into something new" (p. 21). This point offers a feedback loop to the key issue of representation. *The Beat of Boyle Street* allows young people to speak through their musical and creative voices and compositions. More importantly, the process of doing music together allows for us to enter into dialogue during shared moments of *artistry*.

This artistry operates on multiple levels, so that the process could become something like a fractal, a pattern repeated within itself: what we are doing (creating music by sampling sound from the environments around us, from existing songs, from synthesizers, and from our own voices) resembles what we are doing (creating a unique culture by sampling from the culture around us) and echoes what I am doing (creating an

ethnographic text by sampling from *The Beat of Boyle Street*, and from a range of academic and popular sources).

Research as art/Art as research

Art occupies a central space in my chosen research design. Art is a powerful descriptor in the context of this proposal, because art allows for the unexpected, the unexplained, and the serendipitous. Janesick (1998) sees "research design as a work of art: as an event, a process, with phases connected to different forms of problematic experience, and their interpretation and representation" (p. xiii). She infuses the qualitative research design process with a sense of passionate artistry, noting that the shared experience between the researcher and the participants emerges from a design that is open to the possibilities of understanding the meanings of given social contexts. She seeks to reconnect the human and passionate elements of research, arguing that "becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people" (1998, p. 51).

Paul Willis' ethnographic work (1978, 1990, 2000) also guides artistic aspects of my ethnographic art/research. In *The Ethnographic Imagination* (2000), Willis notes that "life as art" is cliché, but asks, what are the consequences of viewing everyday relations as if they contained artistic creativity? Art is often presented as something uncommon, as something that explodes everyday assumptions about the social world and the ways that people think about their everyday lives. Willis (2000) proposes turning the lens of this artistic "way of seeing" upon the everyday. Yet the art of everyday living is more than seeing the world artistically. For Willis (2000), human artistry extends beyond seeing the everyday as art, to artistically making the everyday. Seeking to reclaim art as living, not

as "a textual thing" (p. 3), Willis (2000) situates the experience of doing art as integral to human meaning making. People, he contends, make and remake the material conditions of their lives, and "survive by making sense of the world and their place in it. This is cultural production, as making sense of themselves as social actors in their own cultural worlds… in making our cultural worlds, we make ourselves" (p. xiv). In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, young people are actively engaged in making musical art, in using music to make sense of themselves and their place in the world, and in artistically producing themselves. Learning to produce music "explodes" the taken-for-granted, quotidian aspects of music in everyday life.

I am continually reminded of the effects of this process as we sample, remix, record and produce music. Often the finished product is sonically challenging to the ear, rough, or not even easily categorized as "music". However, the process of generating such "noise" is quite often engaging, fun, highly creative, and artistic. I am also reminded of how I am artistically "made" through the project, when students call me "teacher" or "music man", or in the moments when I am interpellated into my own whiteness, age, class, education level, and difference. The process of doing art together with these young people allows me to view our everyday relations reverberating by means of the sounds of artistic creativity.

Adding the song: Hypermediated ethnography

Technological innovation and new media allow different ways of doing ethnography, beyond the *only-written* text. Digital audio and video media, websites, and CD-ROMs allow for experimental texts that expand and challenge the notions of representation, authorship and readership. Poster (1990) wrote that:

> Changes in the configuration or wrapping of language alters the way the subject processes signs into meaning, that sensitive point of cultural production. The shift from oral and print wrapped language to electronically wrapped language thus reconfigures the subject's relation to the world. (p. 11)

Hypermedia representations are transforming ethnographic representation. The young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, for example, use computers to record their own voices and express their interactions with popular culture through audio production. This allows for the presence of their voices in the text in new and creative ways.

The paradox in ethnography, according to Baudrillard (1994), has previously been that "in order for the ethnology to live, its object must die; by dying, the object takes its revenge for being 'discovered' and with its death defies the science that wants to grab it" (p. 7). Initially, hypermedia representations would appear to do less violence to ethnographic subjects. Dicks and Mason (1998) celebrated hypermedia's potential, stating that:

> One of the most exciting promises of hypermedia resides in its capability for accommodating non-sequentiality, polyphony and multi-perpespectivalism in its mixed-media features. The potential for integrating the visual [or aural] and the textual within the same medium is considerable. It allows us to take the step from thinking of the visual [or aural] merely as illustrative of argumentation spelled out through the printed word and to see [hear] it as itself constitutive of meaning. Thus we need to consider seriously what hypermedia can do that a well-illustrated

> and produced book cannot. There are potential gains to be derived from exploring how interpretation is simultaneously a verbal and a pictorial, a visual and an aural activity. Ethnographic knowledge can be thought of anew in terms that enrich those traditionally afforded by written narratives. ("Hypermedia: Hypertextual and mixed media authoring" section, para. 3.7)

However, questions of representation (even *hypermediated* representation) require ambivalence to Baudrillard's (1994) question of "killing" the object of inquiry. A central concern remains for ethnographic responsibility; that is, the care and concern for the ways of ethnographically representing "the other." There is a continued need for sensitivity to the harm that ethnographic representations can do. Yet, as Dicks and Mason (1998) point out, experimentation with representational mediums, as a way of creating a more dialogic, reflexive ethnography is useful in constructing ethnographic text:

> Reflexivity is not about pretending there is no difference between the voices of participants and that of authors; instead it involves acknowledging and foregrounding the inevitable processes of selection and interpretation that make 'authoring' what it is. Hypermedia, in our opinion can only aid such a project. ("A more holistic ethnographic practice" section, para. 2.7)

Hypermediated ethnography, given critical attention and reflexivity, would seem to allow for a greater shared *authority*. New media technology—such as the audio production software employed in *The Beat of Boyle Street*—offers new and exciting

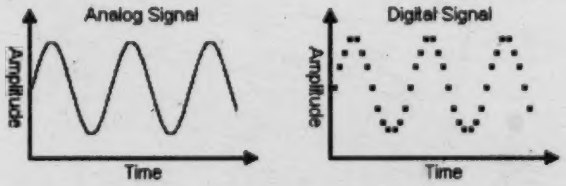
opportunities to dialogue with and include the voices of young people in ethnographic research.

Nevertheless, ethnographies are fictional accounts, as constructed and partial stories. Ethnographic work "involves a 'representation' of others even when it does not explicitly claim to speak for or on behalf of them.... there are ethical and political responsibilities arising from this fact" (Atkinson and Hammersly, 1998, p. 120). Arguing that there are no neutral (non-political) way to represent the social (or natural) world, Atkinson and Hammersly (1998) discuss challenging the "conventionality of ethnographic texts" (p. 122) and attending to the sensitivity towards representations of Self and Other. Most importantly, Atkinson and Hammersly site the trend toward "dialogic" ethnographies "in which the text allows for a multiplicity of voices" (1998, p. 127). This position resonates with Fine's (1998) critique of "participant observation" as "monologic" (p. 141) and frames the project at hand as one of *listening* to the voices of those speaking about themselves. I've attempted to capture the polyphony of student voices at BSEC in an aural composition, collected from various "rant" and "bitch" sessions recorded in our class sessions [**CD Track 6**]. In these sessions, we sit in a circle, and I show students how to connect a microphone to a mixer and then into a computer, set appropriate volume levels, and record our voices as we each hold and speak into the microphone. We select a topic, such as riding the bus, and pass the microphone around the circle. Only the person holding the mic may speak. I have layered several of these sessions together to bring metaphorically to mind the polyphony that occurs in the everyday clamor of the project.

Ethnography as sampling

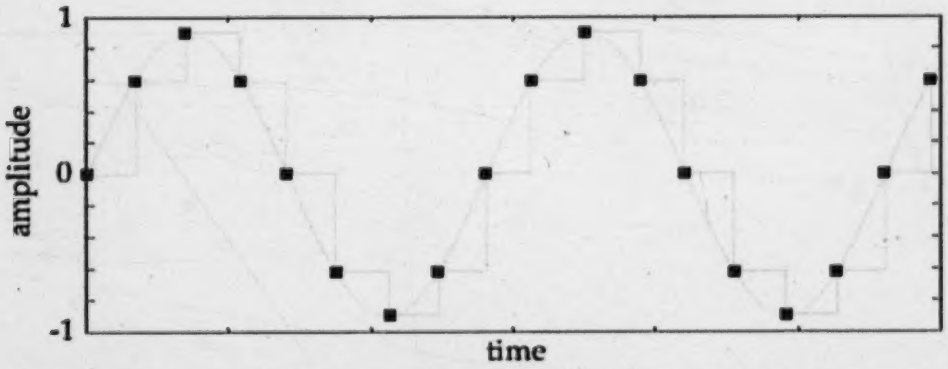
The ethnographic text will be composed from many of the components—texts, sounds, songs, journal notes, and anecdotes—available within *The Beat of Boyle Street*. In effect, I have "sampled" from them, pulling bits and pieces from the texts and composing them together in a bricolage. In this sense, sampling gives another spin to the meaning of "producer"—a bricoleur. The word "sample" works within multiple layers of meaning in this bricolage.

In digital audio production, sampling refers to converting sounds (e.g., a voice) into digital information to be used by the computer. Digital audio is simply sound represented by numbers. Converting audio (e.g., "sound" as it travels through the air) to digital audio requires that the analog signal (e.g., from a microphone) be "sampled." Digitized audio is "sampled audio." Many times each second, the computer samples the analog signal. How often these samples are taken is referred to as the "sampling rate." The amount of information stored about each sample is referred to as the "sample size." The image below illustrates how an analog signal, in the shape of a sine wave would be converted to a digital signal (I tell students to imagine the cross-section of a still lake. Throw in a pebble, and this is what the sound of that pebble would look like, as the vibrations or waves move through the water). The signal is represented by "amplitude" (height of the wave) and "frequency" (the length of waves). Each sample represents the amplitude of the audio signal at the moment in time that it was recorded. Each dot in the digital signal represents one sample.



The spaces between audio samples establish the quality of the reproduction. The speed at which the computer records samples is usually described in terms of cycles per second (Hertz/Hz) or thousands of cycles per second (Kilohertz/kHz). Compact Discs use a sample rate of 44.1 kHz, so they contain 44,100 samples for every second of digital audio (http://www.sonicspot.com/guide/digitalaudio.html, Digital Guide, Sample Rate, para. 1).

A similar graphic illustration indicates the difference between an analog (the curved line) and digital sine wave (the square dots), mapped onto each other:



Burk, Polansky, Repetto, Roberts, and Rockmore (2003)[3] refer to the digital waveform as an *approximation*, and note the imprecision of the representation of the sine wave as it becomes digitized and looks like a "staircase." They note:

> Staircasing is an artifact of the digital recording process, and illustrates how digitally recorded waveforms are only approximations of analog sources. They will always be approximations, in some sense, since it is theoretically impossible to store truly continuous data digitally. However, by increasing the number of samples taken each second (sample rate), as well as the accuracy of those samples (resolution), an extremely accurate

> recording can be made. (Looking at analog and digital waveform representations section, para. 3)

These ideas—samples, waveforms, sample rates, and resolutions—operate as metaphors in my interpretive inquiry. The samples of the students' music and experiences in *The Beat of Boyle Street* produce a complex cultural "waveform," also with amplitude and frequency (loudness and pitch). The waveform may be read as a representation of youth culture—symphonic and polyvocal, involving many voices and many themes. The sampled "remix" in an ethnographic text is its own waveform representation.

Metaphorically, the students' compositions are representations of who they are and the lives they lead. Ethnographically, I am interested in "the quality of the reproduction" yet the ethnographic representations will be "only approximations" of the lived experiences of youth. However, the idea is to strive for "an extremely accurate recording [as] can be made." These digital audio metaphors are useful tools (Janesick, 1998) in interpretive inquiry to better understand the processes of popular culture, recreation practices, and the everyday lives of young people.

In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, the medium is the message (McLuhan, 1964), and that message is music. Through music young people tell stories about themselves and about their lives. Therefore, the musical compositions that young people create will comprise a sizeable portion of the "data" that I will collect. These songs will be situated within stories and anecdotes BSEC students tell me, my daily journal reflections (which I keep in electronic form on a laptop computer), interviews conducted with students to learn more about their compositions and lives, news reports, or other media that will contextualize the processes that we share during the project. After all, a better

understanding of the processes of how young people "do" popular culture through leisure and music is what I'm seeking to address through this research project.

Verse 4—Analysis: Borderlands and border crossings

This section describes how I will interpret and present the material that the project produces: students' songs, stories, soundscapes, beats, spoken word poems, lyrics, remixes; my journal, anecdotes, and reflections; as well as videos, pictures, and news media. These compositions and artefacts evoke the flavours of young people's lives, and resound with the musical/pop cultural inflections and intersections that I have shared with them. Arguably, rap/hip-hop music, as a form of artistic creativity, is one way of constructing and reading the world, and situating oneself in it (Janesick, 2001). The same may be said of ethnographic writing. Dimitriadis (2001b) claims that ethnographic writers are:

> responsible for the ways we as unique individuals inhabit one another's worlds, as well as how we write up our empirical material (or 'data'), opening a space to see ethnography writ large, as a political praxis that individuals engage in particular ways and with real effects. (p. 579)

This section of my proposal is about ethnographic space as a creative, political practice and the "real effects" that Dimitriadis acknowledges. In this space, note Fine and Weis (1998), researchers must try "to meld *writing about* and *working with*" (p. 277) in an emergent and often messy process. In this practice, I must self-reflexively situate myself in the work and writing of the project, while resisting "othering" and the creation of "neatly bounded subjects" (Dimitriadis, 2001b, p. 580). Fine (1994) referred to this process as "working the hyphens" in the Self-Other relationship, recognizing that both

Self and Other rely upon and participate in the construction and understanding of one another. Fine and Weis (1998) conclude:

> Our obligation is to come clean 'at the hyphen,' meaning that we interrogate in our writings who *we* are as we coproduce the narratives we presume to 'collect'.... As part of this discussion, we want, here, to try to explain how we, *as researchers*, work *with* communities to capture and build on community and social movements. (p. 277-278)

I read this to mean that when we work together as researchers, leaders, teachers, students, and participants, we act as "border crossers" as we move between identity positions in multiple roles and relationships.

Therefore, I will situate my analysis of *The Beat of Boyle Street* in the conceptual and physical space of the borderlands, a zone where people may act as border crossers. The idea of a border operates not only where two cultures physically touch one another (e.g., 104th Street marks the border between downtown and the northern "fringe" communities), but also wherever there are relations between different people (e.g., race, class, gender, or other markers of difference). Rather than a thin line demarcating a clean break between different peoples, borders represent complex, multilayered spaces comprised of anything that crosses the definition of "normal." For Anzaldúa (1999), people who inhabit in-between borderland worlds are invariably marked by nationality, e.g., as "Mexicans" or "Mexican-Americans"; and race, e.g., as "Blacks", "Indians", or "Chicanos" (p. 25); as well as by categories of sexuality and gender. Other classifications in the politics of identity are in play here as well. For Anzaldúa (1999):

> The Borderlands are physically present wherever two cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. I am a border woman, I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that tejas-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. (p. 20)

The borderlands are a space where the collision and convergence of different people, cultures, and identities create "a shock culture, a border culture, a third country" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 33) that is continually shifting and being remade anew. Though the borderlands are often dangerous and uncomfortable worlds to inhabit, they provide new, hopeful spaces for the creation of radical subjectivities. As people occupy multiple positions along axes of difference, border crossings open up possibilities for a plurality of meanings and voices to proliferate. Thus the borderlands are often a space of ambiguity and tension. Certainly, borderlands are spaces that are difficult to classify, as classification—particularly binary classifications—are not neatly (nor for any length of time) mapped upon borderlands or border crossers.

This defiance toward classification in binary dualisms, especially the violent hierarchies present between **white**/color, **male**/female, **affluent**/poor, **good**/bad, is the ultimate potential of crossing borders. According to Giroux (1992), the border:

> signals a recognition of those epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins that structure the language of history, power, and difference... it also speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power. (p. 28)

Although hip-hop originated as an expression of urban African-American experience (Lipsitz, 1994), its style has been appropriated and infused with different meanings in different localities (Ballinger, 1995; Bennett, 2000; Dimitriadis, 2001a; Krims, 2000), and it is often employed as resistance to racial oppression. Efron (2001) noted that there is

> a North America-wide trend of young Natives embracing rap music. Hip-hop has overtaken both heavy rock and traditional pow-wow music as the music of choice on the reserves, and many Native MCs, DJs, graffiti artists, and break-dancers are popping up everywhere. It's not surprising given that 56 percent of Canada's aboriginal population is less than 24 years old. Many grow up in poverty and identify with the rap lyrics from the African-American ghettos. (Section 1, para. 3)

The power of hip-hop to cross cultures and express the experiences of Aboriginal-Canadian youth is further explained by hooks (1990):

> The overall impact of postmodernism is that many groups now share with black folks a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense

> of grounding even if it is not informed by shared circumstance. Radical postmodernism calls attention to those shared sensibilities which cross the boundaries of class, race, gender, etc., that could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy—ties that promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition. (p. 27)

Many of the compositions that the students in *The Beat of Boyle Street* create are representative of notions of popular culture as borderland space. Often, our discussions in the music room about music and pop cultural issues are indicative of occurring in borderlands as well. Giroux (1992) believes that popular culture is an important site for crossing borders and connecting to others in borderlands. An example of this is present in my journal reflections regarding taking a group of students and teachers to see the film *Tupac: Resurrection.*

> *Brett's Journal, December 4th, 2003: The students were so excited to go to see the documentary Tupac: Resurrection, perhaps hoping that it would confirm their hopes that Tupac had indeed risen from the dead! However, it was a small issue to get enough "teachers" (of the official-power-to-supervise-field-trips variety) to chaperone the event. For most teachers, it seems Tupac is a name synonymous with the ills of gangsta rap, and they cringe and wince when they hear it. Eventually, I found an English teacher who actually wanted to go, and a math teacher, who qualified only because she has a van and would drive us. The general school population was slightly outraged that I was only taking the current group of music students. For most students, Tupac is a hero of a nearly godlike*

caliber. I rode to the cinema with the math teacher and five students, discussing what we knew about Tupac's life and times.

Isn't this a borderland? When I engage with most "older" folks in conversations I have a tendency toward trying to get them to see Tupac as something other than pure evil, violence and negativity. Conversely, I often speak with "younger" people who see Tupac as an untarnished, invulnerable, flawless, superhero. I try to point out that Tupac was both heroic and thuggish, both caring and violent, capable of tremendous deeds of goodness and acts of hatred, and lots of smaller things not in the category of any extreme. Thankfully, the film—in large part—confirms Tupac's humanity (though it is glossy and skewed somewhat toward, if not deification, at least beatification). Our discussions afterward were quite thoughtful, indicating some recognition of the contradictions and paradoxes in Tupac's music and actions.

Through a critical engagement with popular culture, teachers and students become border crossers creating new spaces for empathy and identification. The math teacher who chaperoned this field trip still doesn't identify with rap music. However, our post-viewing discussions indicated a *movement* toward better understandings of the poetic and political power of rap music and popular culture. While this teacher still didn't like Tupac's music, she did appreciate his political messages regarding opposition to race and class injustices and inequities. Conversely, young people reflected upon the film in ways that validated the investments that they have already made in rap music and popular culture as a site for identity formation. Yet, students recognized that Tupac was a rapper with the capacity to make mistakes, have regrets, and—instead of being a superhero—he

was not so unlike any of them struggling with poverty, racism, drugs, violence, poor parenting, crime, and the struggle to survive. Dimitriadis (2001b) noted:

> I came to see the kind of urgency young people (especially young men) invested in rap music and its often problematic images and messages (again, my initial focus of interest) in very different ways. I came to see their use of rap music, their constructions of invulnerable icons, their constructions of community, as one node in a much larger elaboration of resources for survival upon which young people drew. (p. 593)

Dimitriadis (2001b) goes on to say that within the circumstances of his work with youth, the best he could operate was "as a kind of 'border crosser'" (p. 595) within the limits and possibilities of developing relationships with the young people in his study.

Soundscapes and borderlands

> *I want to transport listeners into a place that's close to where I am when I compose, and which I like. They're going to occupy that place differently, by listening to it differently, but still, it's a place.*
>
> - Soundscape composer Hildegard Westerkamp (quoted in McCartney, 2000)

In the rest of this section I've chosen to highlight soundscape compositions to demonstrate how I will offer analysis of *The Beat of Boyle Street* through borderlands concepts. In our musical work, soundscapes act as representational border crossings; young people and I act as border crossers; and we experience downtown spaces as borderlands.

A soundscape is an aural collage, created by juxtaposing, overlapping, and mixing a variety of recorded and "found" sounds together. Soundscapes, according to du Gay et al. (1997), refer not only to the "actual" sounds of the world, but also to the meanings, feelings, and associations that occur in the "landscape of the mind" (p. 20). Portable digital recorders allow the sounds from everyday life—streets, cafes, subway stations, and voices—to be recorded, stored, and transferred into a computer with relative ease. Soundscape compositions highlight the contestation of cultural "use of things" such as city spaces and music in what Berland (1992) notes are "complex effects of emancipation and domination in the (re)formation of marginal politics and cultural identities" (p. 46). The young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street* embody their identities in a variety of complex, hybridized ways: through their style of dress, hair style, in their tattoos, in the manner they speak, the ways that they dance, and their attitudes about being Aboriginal-Canadian. "Who they are" is a polyfugue of cultural forces, collaged from how they have been historically positioned within society, as well as from their experiences as agents for change resisting the assignment of subject positions (Scott, 1992). They have learned about "what it means" to be who they are as they move through city spaces, interacting with others and sometimes transgressing ideological and cultural borders (Anzaldúa, 1999; Giroux, 1992, 1997; hooks, 1990). Student soundscape compositions echo the types of border "straddling" inherent in Anzaldúa's Borderlands, occupying multiple, in-between cultural spaces and places. They also reflect the types of violence and intolerance that young Aboriginal people experience when they attempt to cross ideological and physical borders **[CD Track 7]**:

When I'm rolling on the bus all I see is bad streets, no peace

While I'm bumpin' to my beats, makes me wanna give up on life

Cut myself with a knife.

It hurts to see my brothers begging for money

Stuck in the game, feeling the shame

Please God we fought for our land, we brought our clan, been real to our band.

When I see us now the girl makes me want to hurl,

Why we gotta be hated non-jaded and waited on.

Stop the racist-ism, start the create-ism.

People look at me like I'm nothing,

But deep down inside I feel I'm something

When I'm strolling through the 'hood, all I see is people up to no good.

The city noises that create the soundscape over which this spoken-word poem is layered consists of a bricolage of sounds collected from places around the inner-city: buses rumbling and traffic whizzing by, video game fighting sounds recorded at the bus station, the murmur of conversations in the food court in the city centre mall, dialing payphones, rhythms tapped on metal fences, subway trains and station announcements for University-bound trains.

When I commented that there was a profound absence of "natural" sounds such as birdsong in our recordings, this student commented that this was because "I live where the ghetto bird flies." For her, the "ghetto bird" is the poverty, neglect, and hatred that she sees and hears all around her. This young woman's soundscape clearly articulates the cultural collision that occurs where the affluence of the downtown business core meets the fringe communities a few blocks to the north. The negative gaze that she feels

directed at her because she is young, Native, and dressed in hip-hop clothes (see Appendix A for photos of BSEC students and their everyday hip-hop clothes) is part of the subtle yet pervasive racism directed toward many Aboriginal youth in the city. The soundscape is not only an aural representation of the places of her everyday life, but also a cultural representation of her constructions of who she is and the symbolic power of hip-hop and creativity to resist/counter racism, poverty, and hopelessness.

There is a certain danger and power in crossing borders and being "out of place," a politics of space that cuts across material and symbolic boundaries. Hall (1997) writes that:

> what unsettles culture is 'matter out of place'—the breaking of our unwritten rules and codes. Dirt in the garden is fine, but dirt in one's bedroom is 'matter out of place'—a sign of pollution, of symbolic boundaries transgressed, of taboos broken. What we do with 'matter out of place' is to sweep it up, throw it out, restore it to order, bring back the normal state of affairs. The retreat of many cultures towards 'closure' against foreigners, intruders, aliens, and 'others' is part of the same process of purification. (p. 236)

Soundscape compositions become representations of young people's tactical attempts at resisting the closure of spaces. The spoken word and rhyming rap that youth add to their soundscapes also disrupt notions of clear, well-defined borders of not only music, but also places, identities and communities. Giroux (1994b) wrote:

> The modernist world of certainty and order has given way to a planet in which hip-hop and rap condenses time and space into what Paul Virilio

> calls 'speed space.' No longer belonging to any one place or location, youth increasingly inhabit shifting cultural and social spheres marked by a plurality of languages and cultures. (Border Youth and Postmodern Culture section, para. 1)

A spoken word piece created by a BSEC student dramatically characterizes "speed space" and the difficulties of inhabiting "shifting cultural and social spheres": **[CD Track 8]**:

Being abused got my heart pretty bruised

Now I lay in the dark alone and confused

Wondering what—what is my mean?

Was I put on this earth to be a speed fiend?

Now what could be worse than a drug addict's birth?

My life's been a curse, so ask what I'm worth,

Probably nothing in the eyes of our earth.

Other examples of soundscapes contain narration that describes student reactions and negotiations to their interpellation into negative stereotypes and identity positions of beggars, bad Indians, or just "another Native" **[CD track 9]**:

We just record everything that's going by?

Well let's walk!

A lot of casual people say 'hello' and not a lot of other people will,

They'll just turn their heads.

You don't notice the flaws...

It's so noisy everywhere...

People look stressed, busy and tired...

We just record everything that's going by?

Well let's walk!

People look stressed, busy and tired...

They're in their own thoughts...

Walking up the stairs...

Childhood memories...

Different nationalities...

But no one's saying "hello" back...

Childhood memories...

They probably just think:

'Another Native' from the way I'm dressed.

The borderlands offer a concept that opens space for de-centred subjects—"chorasters" (Wearing and Wearing, 1996)—capable of creating meaning across boundaries. These borders, real-and-imagined, divide and separate, yet also link and connect. We are articulating the borderlands in the soundscapes that we create as we move through the city, as we share experiences and discuss "what it means" to be who we are, where we are. Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) discuss the hopefulness and potential of moving into a hybrid "thirdspace" (see also Soja, 1996) represented by the borderlands:

> Hybrids, Creoles, mestizos—these are names for a new form of postmodern subject who no longer is caught in what Donna Haraway

> (1991) calls the "spiral dance," a subject who no longer needs an Other to define itself, a subject that is continuously engaged in 'stitching' itself together and 'assembling' itself out of various identity parts available in popular culture and everyday life, none of which fit together too neatly or hold together too long. (p. 21)

These words vibrantly echo metaphoric qualities of producing computer-generated music—sampling and remixing—as well as the way that young people construct and are constructed by the culture around them. This passage effectively describes why I believe that *The Beat of Boyle Street* is well suited for analysis through the concepts of the borderlands, in-between spaces, and border crossings.

As an artist/researcher/teacher/learner/collaborator (Finley and Knowles, 1995) with the young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, the borderlands provides me with ways of critically listening, thinking, and being in a shared cultural space. hooks (1994) argued hopefully that "when we desire to decolonize minds and imaginations, cultural studies' focus on popular culture can be and is a powerful site for intervention, challenge, and change" (p. 4). The students' music (soundscapes and otherwise) challenges me (as an educated, white, middle-class, 30-something-year-old man) to think through the different forms and relationships to beauty, anger, silence, and meaningfulness in the disjuncture that occurs in young people's everyday lives. This disjuncture is difference. Difference reveals the possibilities of allowing the opening of new, creative, expressive, and transformative spaces:

> We are articulating new positions in these in-between Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academies... in our literature, social issues

> such as race, class, and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv-xxvi)

Fade out—A new place sings back: Making music/making place in The Beat of Boyle Street

> "It starts with a place, then it creates a new place inside the composition."
> - Soundscape composer Hildegard Westerkamp (Quoted in McCartney, 2000)

Rap and hip-hop are complex, contradictory, and often misunderstood areas of popular culture that take on a wide range of meanings and uses in the places of young people's lives. Thus, researchers and educators need to engage with popular culture critically and substantively, and anchor our analyses in "historic and ongoing struggles over power and knowledge" (Carlson and Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 21). In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, students make and use music to express their difficult everyday realities, their struggles with education and the lack of opportunities for positive recreational experiences.

They also use music to *make* places. One student, "Kree-Azn", uses *The Beat of Boyle Street*'s sound system to convert the school's common area into a breakdancing practice place. Every morning before school, and during the hour-long lunch break, he and other students congregate to practice and show off their skills in breakdancing. Dozens of onlookers (students, as well as clients from the community Co-Op upstairs from the school) gather to watch these sessions. Often, during school breaks such as lunch, students have few opportunities for participating in interesting things to do or finding positive places to hang out, and many drift away from the school to take drugs,

get in fights, engage in stealing, or are simply bored and have nothing to do. Now, some students work in the music room before school or after eating lunch. Others breakdance. The ways that young people use popular culture to remake ordinary places into new, creative places affirm the deep symbolic identifications and cultural values attached to certain practices and certain sites, a shared process of making meaning and making places. Kree-Azn communicated the dialogic relationship between hip-hop breakdancing, and his identity **[CD Track 10]**:

Hip-hop made me the person who I am today.

I think I'd be selling drugs, I'd be in jail, or either I'd probably be dead right now

Without out that stuff.

And I'm not one of those gangstas, I'm not a negative person,

I'm straight-up positive.

Yeah, that's who I be,

I'm half Native and half Vietnamese.

So my boy was sitting there, and he knew that I was half Native and half Asian,

He was like, "yo, you know what would be a sick name for you?

Kree-Azn" [Cree-Asian]

You know? Like, a word "creative", like "creation", or

Two races that click together, you know, like,

It does the same thing with hip-hop, like,

There's no certain race you have to be in hip-hop,

There's no certain skin color,

It's all about what's inside you, the creativity.

Young people are creating and creatively using places and spaces in the meaningful everyday recreational activities (such as rapping and breakdancing) of their everyday lives. Projects like *The Beat of Boyle Street* support the investments young people make in popular culture, and contribute to ways that musical practices are sites for empowering youth. Our music room is a place for enjoying music, sharing stories of hardships and successes, and rapping about social injustices. It is also a place where we may learn from one another, in dialogue, as we work the hyphens in our relationships and identities.

Coda—What is the value of hip-hop? Relevance revisited...

In closing, I want to re-visit a question of significance: What is the value of rap/hip-hop music—and young people's creative uses of it—to the field of recreation and leisure studies? Kun (1994), speaking in educational terms of literacy, asked: "to what extent can we work through rap as a paradigm for the incorporation of music into the daily lesson plan?" (sample 7, para. 1). I see this equally as a question of leisure, that is, how can a recreation project work through the "paradigm of rap" and understand music as an integral part of everyday living? In other words, the point is not only about asking how this recreation project moves young people into new creative and representational practices, but also how notions of recreation and leisure practice and research must make a movement, a border crossing, too. How could the field of recreation and leisure better value and work with popular culture and rap music? Kun (1994)—again, speaking about young people and literacy—noted that:

> the music they listen to everyday is not only something that they can attempt to produce, and not only something that they could probably have

> taught their teachers about, but also something that is worthy of study in the classroom, something that can play an enormous role in their intellectual and social development. (sample 6, para. 1)

Whose intellectual and social development? Hopefully Kun is referring to students and *teachers*. Rap/hip-hop music saturates multiple layers of the fabric of young people's social lives and identities, and is a vital component of young people's leisure. We must recognize and remember the importance of popular culture within leisure, particularly as it opens windows to hear (a *catachresis*: mixed metaphors, especially the use of a paradoxical figure of speech such as "blind mouths") the voices of the youth in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, speaking about their lives, and telling stories through rap/hip-hop music. Cornel West stressed the importance of popular culture, claiming:

> If you're going to understand what's going on in [North] American culture, you must first come to terms with popular culture... that saves lives. That's in part what culture does, it convinces you not to kill yourself, at least for a little while. (cited in Kun, 1994, sample 5, para. 3)

Cultural critic bell hooks wrote of the importance of people's voices, claiming that "It is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject" (1989, p. 9). Similarly, Ballinger (1995) wrote:

> Recent literary criticism emphasizes the importance of "voice" in cultural resistance. For oppressed peoples under slavery, in colonial contexts and the underclasses of global capitalism, music has often been a central site for the intervention in dominant discourses and for creating forms of

> expression that are culturally affirming… Locating a position of vocality and self-representation is central to creating a counter-narrative, positing a counter-essence and in critically attacking the legitimacy of "objective" knowledge and truth. (p. 15)

In an interview with Sakolsky (1995), Native rapper Bobby Bee echoed the importance of speech:

> My music is a form of change because it brings up the issues in the first place. I always thought that half the problem in anything is not even knowing there is a problem ... true hip-hop, when it first began, was all about what was going on in the neighborhood… [the] problem with some rappers is doing unpositive things with the music because it is such a powerful medium. Too much of it is wasted on dissing one another or talking about gangs, sex, and drugs. If you realize the power of the medium of music, I think you can bring about positive changes as opposed to negative. (p. 164)

Bee's strategy attempts to replace negative representations with more positive ones—songs, poems, soundscapes—as celebrations of difference, in order to change power dynamics by constructing "a positive identification with what has been abjected" (Hall, 1997, p. 273). Thus, for the young people in *The Beat of Boyle* Street, hip-hop may become a powerful expression of being Native, a hopeful celebration of culture, youth, and survival.

However, for Hall (1997), larger cultural questions about the effectiveness of any politics of representation remain. He noted:

> The problem with the positive/negative strategy is that adding positive images to the largely negative repertoire of the dominant regime of representation increases the diversity of the ways in which "being black" [or Native/Aboriginal] is represented, but does not *necessarily* displace the negative. Since the binaries remain in place, meaning continues to be framed by them. The strategy challenges the binaries—but it does not undermine them. (p. 274)

This thinking produces a sense of winning a battle, but losing the larger war. Will young Aboriginal people always be seen as "*just* another Native" whether they are educated or not, wear hip-hop clothes or not, or appropriate and employ popular culture in highly creative (or seemingly pedantic) ways? Will negative stereotypes remain in place within a larger cultural framework that could see students create evocative soundscape poems one day, and be labeled as gang members by the media the next?

On a macro-level of cultural change, the politics of representation involves a struggle in which meaning is always contested, partial, and unfinished (Hall, 1997). As de Certeau (1984) points out, the ability of dominant cultural ideologies to legitimate themselves fully is never totally ensured. As we create soundscapes, poems, raps, and music, the young people and I engage in discussions of race, class, and gender, and we talk to each other about ways that some ideologies operate in our everyday lives. We talk about how things could be different for us, and we ask questions about the options that seem available to us from which to choose. hooks (1994) stressed that "talking critically about popular culture [is] a powerful way to share knowledge, in and outside the academy, across differences, in an oppositional way" (p. 4). These small victories inform

larger hegemonic processes of social change, cultural hybridity, border crossings as people to make and remake popular culture into meaningful aspects of their everyday lives.

The aim, according to Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003), is to "help young people construct different but not oppositional identities and to encourage them to continuously engage in the creative reconstruction of identity that crosses borders and moves outside of binary oppositional logic" (p. 20-21). Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) quote Stuart Hall's (1996) comments about making identity through serious and subversive play:

> Play suggests, on the one hand 'the instability, the permanent unsettlement, the lack of any final resolution.' The meaning of 'blackness' or 'womanness' or 'gayness' is always in play in this sense, always shifting and changing in response to a play of cultural forces. On the other hand, play suggests a subversion of the reigning binary oppositions that define identity, a playful movement across boundaries so that identity categories are no longer understood as mutually excluding categories. (p. 21)

Students such as Kree-Azn, fr0lic, Ed Mile, and others in *The Beat of Boyle Street* have created positive, hopeful and celebratory concepts of themselves, as young, urban, Aboriginal people through the subversive and serious use of hip-hop music, dance, and style. Within the range of this project, they are learning how to make their own music, offering creative new ways of telling their own stories and representing themselves. When recreation practitioners, instructors and collaborators recognize the serious

playfulness of hip-hop and popular culture, perhaps we will begin to offer young people something other than "tissues" for "issues" **[CD Track 11]**:

Yo, there's a problem, of an issue

I told you we as Natives can't wipe away with tissue

An eternal wound and itch too,

there isn't a doctor to stitch you,

they ditch you,

for the cash, fool.

At least 50% of society is cool,

like my man, too, taught me in school to do what I can to help you,

Who says we can't make a change,

helping the north, the reserves, in the rural life that's strange?

So we try to identity blocks,

tell people with children "stop smoking rocks!"

And the flocks of life's lost clients

want to relieve the long overdrawn silence,

contributing to some sort of alliance,

Instead of resorting to violence

'cause that's just a minus.

---

[1] Ballinger (1995) uses George Clinton's funk classic "Atomic Dog" to illustrate this: "bow wow wow yippee yo yippee yay"—these lyrics are inane and offer little insight into what funk music means, or how funk music operates in the everyday lives of the people who listen to it.

[2] The differences between "rap" and "hip-hop" are contested, but some very general distinctions can be made. "Rap" typically refers to vocal artistry (e.g., emcee-ing, performing a good lyrical rap) and more generally to the commercial and mass cultural form of rap music, embodied by rappers such as Tupac Shakur, Jay-Z, DMX, or Eminem. "Hip-hop" refers to the broader culture that includes the traditional four elements of hip-hop: Emcee-ing (or rapping), breakdancing (b-boy/b-girl), DJ-ing (turntablism), and graffiti art. Hip-hop purists may denounce commercialized "rap" as not "true hip hop." This claim asserts

that true hip-hop is a more authentic culture because of its constructive and local aspects ("all about people and the street in the neighborhood"). Hip-hop is typically conceived of as more positive, for example, when breakdance "battles" are used as peaceful approaches to conflict, rather than the much-publicized gun battles of "gangsta rap"; or hip-hop's pursuit of artistic skill development through graffiti). In *The Beat of Boyle Street* participants often use the terms interchangeably, particularly when "rap" is a subset of the larger hip-hop culture, i.e., wherever anyone is using rap vocals. Krims (2000) provides a concise summarization (p. 10-12) of the rap/hip-hop debate.

[3] The full interactive web-text from Burk, Polansky, Repetto, Roberts, and Rockmore is available at http://eamusic.dartmouth.edu/~book/index.html and provides detailed explanations of introductory Electro-Acoustic music.

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Defining the groove: ***Remixology*** as research bricolage in ***The Beat of Boyle Street***

Brett D. Lashua

Defining the groove: *Remixology* as research bricolage in *The Beat of Boyle Street*

> We are now the ultimate bricoleurs, trying to cobble together a story that we are beginning to suspect will never enjoy the unity, the smoothness, the wholeness that the Old Story had. As we assemble different pieces of the Story, our bricolage begins to take not one, but many shapes. (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998, p. 425)

If research practices have ethnographic "shapes" (in terms of both product and process), what might a bricolage of music and leisure look and *sound* like? What stories might we tell through music, and what processes construct them? What meanings might musical stories carry, disrupt, and re-create, and how might stories shape who we are, as bricoleurs? If research processes are like musical processes, how do researchers "define the groove" that contour them? These questions resound with the many rhythms in this paper, resonating through the players, locations and processes of my doctoral research, a program called *The Beat of Boyle Street*. This research represents a hip-hop music-making recreation program I coordinated for three years at an inner city chartered high school in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. In the context of my research-practice (or *praxis*—see McLaren, 1997) I struggled to think through my research methods and locate my researcher "self" while staying attuned to the power of leisure, music, and popular culture in young people's lives. Along the way, I sought to step in sync (occasionally missing a beat or two) with sensitivities toward different understandings of race, class, gender, style, and culture. It has been quite a journey.

I have chosen the musical metaphor of "remixology" to describe the processes that comprised my research. As research method and metaphor, remixology combines

aspects of performance, narrative, and art-based methods and analyses. In the "messy" space between research frames (Denzin, 2003), I aim to show how remixology operates in a fashion similar to *bricolage*, incorporating aspects of different ethnographic methods as needed where and when the young people involved in the research rapped, shouted, danced, performed and sang their stories (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003).

A participant in the music program who had recently moved on to a higher education course coined the term "remixology"—the practice of making musical remixes. In an e-mail from "Bigg Dogg," he wrote to me ("B Bomb"):

> "wut up B BOMB me i'm ok will u help me on friday afternoon to do some remixology if not its ok i just miss your help e back asap your bro" (personal communication, December 22, 2004)

This paper expands and explores the hip-hop musical trope of the "remix" as a mode of inquiry and representation that blends research and musical practices: "remixology." This heuristic device facilitates the exploration of popular culture in the everyday lives of urban youth.

Artistic metaphors for research design have been put forth such as portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), drama (Denzin, 2003), dance (Janesick, 1998), and jazz (Dixson, 2005) that expand and offer alternative styles of writing ethnographically and provide different ways to think about research processes. For example, Dixson (2005) noted that jazz offers a method "helpful for further research on topics and issues through which traditional research methodologies might not capture the complexity and nuances" (p. 109), particularly across issues of race, gender and class identity in Black women's experiences. My research draws parallels to artistic research methods and

makes connections to hip-hop music, specifically the hip-hop "remix," articulated through the leisure experiences of urban Aboriginal[1] youth participating in *The Beat of Boyle Street*.

For many Aboriginal youth, hip-hop articulates issues and struggles of power and agency in their lives. In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, young people are actively engaged in creating music, using music to make sense of themselves and their places in the world, artistically producing and reproducing concepts of identities and cultures. Together, we created and shared new spaces for being and becoming through an in-school recreational music-creation program. In this program, musical processes allowed me to view our everyday relations reverberating with the sounds of artistic creativity. This paper asks how we may treat these processes as ethnographic research, i.e., "conducting" an ethnography.

The art of the remix

In popular culture, and particularly hip-hop music, a *remix* is a composition made by selecting different sections (samples) of pre-recorded music and combining them to form a new composition. This practice represents processes of creative adaptation and recontextualization. Also called "mash-ups," remixes symbolize complex and often paradoxical relationships between global and local influences, dominant and underground systems of production, tactical areas of consumption, and a challenge to established dualisms such as authenticity/appropriation, and reproduction/resistance (Dawson, 2002; Shusterman, 1995). Remixes are social phenomena imbued with a variety of symbolic meanings. As a metaphor, the remix has been used to explore various aspects of identity

construction and hybridity, operating as "a popular idiom of expression for many American youths, crossing boundaries of race, class, and urban/suburban location" (Maira, 1998). That is, when thought of as changing, fluid social productions, identities may be understood as types of performative remixes.

The remix additionally operates as an apt metaphor for bricolage. As Willis (2000) noted, through creating the bricolage we become *bricoleurs*. Kinchloe (2001), in the spirit of Levi-Strauss (1966), described the bricoleur as "a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task" (p. 680). Kinchloe went on to add, that in the aftermath of multiple social, cultural, epistemological, and paradigmatic upheavals and revolutions of the last few decades, "research bricoleurs pick up the pieces of what's left and paste them together as best they can" (2001, p. 681). A bricoleur is therefore defined through, and subject to, the act of creating a bricolage.

Along similar lines, Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) wrote of a "subject" as a person who is "continuously engaged in 'stitching' itself together and 'assembling' itself out of various identity parts available in popular culture and everyday life, none of which fit together too neatly or hold together too long" (p. 21). According to du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (1997), practices such as these foster the idea of:

> social subjects as active agents who play a crucial role in creating their own identities through consumption and in indicating how *bricolage*—literally the activity of self-consciously mixing and matching any disparate elements that may be at hand—can cut across given social distinctions to produce new cultural identities. (p. 104)

In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, participants acted as sonic bricoleurs, generating their own drumbeats and rhythms, synthesizing bass lines and keyboard melodies, and adding in their own voices performing raps and telling stories. We also sampled from other, pre-recorded songs and sounds, to create remixes by rearranging a variety of sounds and reconfiguring audio samples in order to make new "remixed" compositions (Cutler, 1995; Théberge, 1997). These processes resonate through musical metaphors for social and political processes such as cultural hybridity, border work/border crossings (Giroux, 1992), and cultural re-appropriation or tactical consumption (de Certeau, 1984) that position us a bricoleurs: "remixologists."

I am deeply indebted to the young people I have made music with in *The Beat of Boyle Street* music program. Young people such as "Bigg Dogg" have taught me much about hip-hop and Aboriginal cultures in western Canada. Most of the students attending the program are urban Aboriginal youth, struggling with poverty, addictions, loss of community and family connections, and often facing challenges of ageism, racism, and homelessness. These young people have taught me about the complex spaces, connections, and disjuncture between their everyday struggles, rap music, storytelling, leisure, and mediated youth cultures. They creatively define and mould themselves through hybrids of popular, mainstream, and traditional cultures. I too, as a researcher, musician, teacher, advocate, and learner, have been remade and "remixed" as "B-Bomb"—"Brett" the "music producer" with beats that "drop like a bomb." I was artistically "made" and remade through the project, when participants called me "teacher" or the "fluorescent Native," and in moments when I was hailed into categories of race (white), gender (male), age (thirty-two), class (middle), and education (university).

Locating the Researcher, Bricoleur, Remixologist

My research methods draw from my musical experiences as a drummer, performer, and audio producer, and intersect with young people's interests, passions, and talents for rapping, dancing, and creative expression. Bennett (2003) claims that the "traditional" tools researchers have "conventionally" relied upon to study youth musical cultures have "produced explanations far removed from those young people for whom music 'matters' on a day-to-day basis (p. 197). Frith (1987) claimed that most social researchers:

> have tended to explain away pop music. In my own academic work I have examined how rock is produced and consumed, and have tried to place it ideologically, but there is no way that a reading of my books (or those of other sociologists) could be used to explain why some pop songs are good and others bad... how is it that people (myself included) can say, quite confidently, that some music is better than others? (p. 133-134, p. 144)

Frith's query raises important questions about the ways that research has explored, valued, and attempted to understand relationships between popular music and young people. Making music with young people allows me to enter into creative processes *with* young people, to explore naturalized or taken-for-granted issues around music and meaning, creation and consumption. If songs are not just "out there" to be passively consumed, then neither are their social meanings or processes of construction. Performing an ethnographic study of a music making recreation program allows me to gain a deeper understanding of the value and spaces of music and leisure in young

people's everyday lives, and to be part—to some extent—in the production of youth musical cultures.

I have made music and played drums (with varying degrees of aptitude) far longer than I have been doing qualitative research. Musical methods often make more "sense" to me as a way to think through social processes. Consequently, I struggled early in my graduate studies with deeply internalized ideas that there was something called "real research" which was somehow "superior," "objective," or closer to producing "truth" than coming to know through processes, sensibilities, and "lenses" of music. I thought research was to be a serious, "worthwhile" activity for "real" academics; music was something of secondary importance, relegated to something "fun," perhaps "interesting," but certainly not in a central location. No one had ever actually *told* me this, yet, even as I began making music daily with young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, I struggled to make connections between the esoteric worlds of academia and the artistically creative worlds of hip-hop music. Therefore, I sought to move leisure and music into more central locations of importance in the research process, where, instead of moments of doing music *or* doing research, what I could do was *musical research*.

These two processes—music and ethnographic research—share many sensibilities that inform one another, such as the interpretive aspects of creating, and the reciprocity of speaking, listening, and responding. Making music as a research process intones Oakley's (2003) notion of "the active interview" through which "interviewers and respondents carry on a conversation about mutually relevant, often biographically critical issues" (p. 239). Crafting a song occurs much like a conversation between players through performance, or with an audience. As a drummer and audio engineer, I am keenly aware

of sensing and engaging in the visceral processes of discovery by which one can listen, feel, and know when the musical conversation is happening, growing, or slipping away.

I reflect on the possible kinds of relationships which may be learned and developed through making music, such as respecting creative differences and allowing spaces for artistic innovations. These relationships involve different kinds of senses: feeling rhythms, listening carefully, creating multi-layered and polyvocal compositions, incorporating and valuing a variety of instruments and "speakers" in a type of simultaneous dialogue or "conversation." For a drummer, making space in the song for a "chorus" of players entails knowing when to lay back and let the rest of the band soar, understanding the importance of absences, silences, or "rests," and intuiting when to accent someone else's melodies and notes. These musical "sensibilities" have provided invaluable insights for research, respectfully sharing processes of creating music with young people, developing rapport, trust, and reciprocal relationships.

My musical and subsequent studio/audio engineering experiences provided a degree of "insider knowledge" of the technical skills involved in hip-hop music production (Bennett, 2003). As a sound "technician," I possess certain audio production abilities, although these were learned "on the fly" rather than through much formal training or education. I view music production largely as a set of processes learned as one experiments, struggles, and develops comfort with the production equipment and software. A potentially never-ending learning curve exists in these processes, along which all sorts of compositions may be created, some of which I remember as "better" solely for the thrill of the creative process, and others notable for creating something without really knowing how I arrived there. In other words, technical virtuosity does not

assure a "quality" performance. Many of my "best" musical compositions involve sounds and audio "blips" which happen almost entirely by accident. If music requires a kind of openness to the unexpected, serendipitous, unintended, and accidental, these are also skills I have found relevant in my ethnographic research (Willis, 1976).

I value the performances and sonic renditions accomplished by the young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street* because we share in their creation and discovery. I appreciate the musical mash-ups that participants make, even when these may sound disjointed and dissonant, because I was present alongside young people to be a part of the creation processes. Hall (2000) explained ethnographic practice "comes down to spending intensive time not only alongside but with and among the people whose lives one hopes to understand" (p. 122). What better way to come to understand the importance of music in young people's lives than to spend time making and sharing music with them?

For nearly twenty years (from age 11 when I began playing drums until I began my doctoral work) I entertained aspirations and had some successes with being a "rock star," touring and performing, recording albums, and making music. During those years, musicianship was central to my sense of self; music was what I did that most defined my identity. Now that I am a "researcher," I define myself through the processes of creating the research bricolage, and it in turn defines me (Richardson, 1997). In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, the researcher's remixology pulls in pieces of music stories, and sounds created by the young people in the project and reassembling them into a meaningful ethnographic story, compilation, or composition. In this, I attempted to engage with concerns about representation, recognizing the importance of voice and creativity, and sought to critically reflect on the power and privileges that I brought to the research. Across the

three years of the study, my prior experiences with music kept me curious about the importance, value, influence, and use of music in young people's everyday lives, and thus curious about creative research processes.

Defining the groove: Searching for rhythms and resonance in research

I'm interested in intersections, tensions, and opportunities for developing understandings of leisure research in the spaces between musical artistry and ethnography. Laurel Richardson (2000) referred to the multiple forms of artistic-scientific representations as *creative analytic practices*: reflexive performance narrative forms such as poetry, drama, short stories, conversations, personal histories. I would add creating music and singing songs as ways to include artistry in research practices.

Similarly, Willis (2000) urged ethnographers to view "everyday relations as if they contained everyday creativity" and see with a "sensitivity to life, like we perceive art" (p. xiv). Willis situates the experience of doing art as integral to human meaning making. People, he contends, make and remake the material and social conditions of their lives, and "survive by making sense of the world and their place in it. This is cultural production, as making sense of themselves as social actors in their own cultural worlds… in making our cultural worlds, we make ourselves" (2000, p. xiv). Remixology, as a bricolage of narrative, performance, and arts-based ethnographic methods, is attuned to processes of making music through audio production or "remixing," and the creative ways we learn, create, represent, and "remix" ourselves as co-producers of songs, stories, cultures, and identities. In what follows I draw parallels to remixology through artistic research practices including portraiture, jazz, dance, and narrative storytelling.

Additionally, I explore how art, music, and storytelling connect musical practices in *The Beat of Boyle Street* to Indigenous research methods and practices.

Portraiture

While my research seeks to explore the spaces and processes of musical representations, Lightfoot-Lawrence and Davis (1997) employ the visual methods of "portraiture." Portraiture seeks to "record and interpret" the experiences and perspectives, and document "the voices and visions" by "drawing" portraits as "translations" of subjects in the research study (p. xv). The portrait represents, in part, the portraitist's vision or view of the subject. Research as portraiture is further "framed" through:

> social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and becomes the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative. (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Davis, 1997, p. xv)

The artistic imagery of portraiture highlights what Lightfoot-Lawrence and Davis refer to as the essential features of portraiture: Context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. These qualities and visual metaphors of portraiture relate to aural aspects of research in *The Beat of Boyle Street*. Like songs, portraits provide "not [a] complete or full representation, but rather the selection of some aspect—or angle on—reality that would transform our vision of the whole" (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Davis, 1997, p. 5). Remixology provides a way, in part, of hearing or re-creating stories, thoughts, feelings, and expressing social relationships and identities. Remixology, then, adds "ears" to the

partiality of the "whole," providing different "angles" sensitive to voices, conversations, relationships, and narratives. Rather than a portrait of a subject as a "product" of the research, sonic remixes narrativize experiences and perspectives musically, creating stories told through sound and audio production. These stories open the researcher to different kinds of questions about leisure, popular culture, youth, and research through shared music making processes.

Jazz

Jazz music offers different "ways of knowing" and understanding research processes. Writing about her concept of "jazz methodology," Dixson (2005) offered:

> ... Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, Jelly Roll Morton, and Louis Armstrong. The efforts of these musicians (and many others) taught me that through jazz, I could make profound statements creatively. In addition, I learned that what I could offer would be part of a collective statement that could and perhaps should be political and liberatory. It is this training (that included learning to be part of an ensemble) that influences my understanding of researching and knowing. (p. 109)

Like Davis (1998) described the blues, Dixson goes on to describe jazz as an appropriate way to connect with the stories, strengths and struggles of Black women's experiences. In this, jazz research methods are part of an "epistemological turn toward research that is situated, contextual, and inherently and explicitly political" (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005, p. 21) and which are further described as part of a "racialized epistemologies" (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Thus, the potential power of remixology as a hip-hop research method in *The Beat of Boyle Street* rests upon its relevance to urban Aboriginal young

people, connecting the importance of popular culture with issues of race, class, and cultural identity in their everyday lives. In this sense, rap music operates as an artistic form of telling "counterstories" (Richardson, 1997) voiced by historically marginalized, silenced, and "invisible" people.

Dance

Other precedents support the infusion of artistry into research processes. Janesick (2000) equates research processes to a metaphoric "dance" between researcher and participant, as they approach, negotiate distances, turn and momentarily move together (*pas de deux*). More than just metaphor, Janesick (1998) sees "research design as a work of art: as an event, a process, with phases connected to different forms of problematic experience, and their interpretation and representation" (p. xiii). She infuses the qualitative research design process with a sense of passionate artistry, noting that the shared experience between the researcher and the participants emerges from a design that is open to the possibilities of understanding the meanings of given social contexts. This process reconnects the human and passionate elements of research, where "becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people" (1998, p. 51).

Narrative

Narrative storytelling also suffuses the compositional orientations of remixology. Like songwriting, "narrative is a telling, a performance event, the process of making or telling a story… Everything we study is contained within a storied, or narrative representation. The self itself is a narrative production… self and society are storied productions" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 240). Narrative can also be understood as the

primary way that people organize their experiences into meaningful episodes (Richardson, 1997). Lyrics are often deeply personal narratives. As a musician, I additionally am aware that songs tell stories, and that I have stories about certain songs; songs may capture key moments in life, and evoke deep emotions, connections to places, and key relationships. My aim is to inflect the processes of ethnography with these very same qualities.

Furthermore, hip-hop draws from traditions of storytelling and performance (Neate, 2003). Best and Kellner (1999) explained that rap narrates hip-hop culture:

> Drawing on the sonorities and inflections of the rhythms of everyday vernacular discourse, as well as the sounds of traditional music, creative use of previous musical technology, and appropriation of new musical technologies, hip hop is noisy, oral, and rhythmic, providing a soundtrack for life in a high-tech world of rapid transformation and turbulent change… Rap is thus the voice and sound of hip hop culture. ("The Moment of Hip-Hop" section, para. 2)

Poet Maya Angelou additionally shared that rap and hip-hop are creative methods of telling stories, like lyric poetry, and "we are characterized by the need to create stories, songs, and poems, and we continue to create" (Retrieved June 13, 2004 from http://hiphopcongress.com/expression/poetry/poetry_archive_angelou.html).

Indigenous methods

More recently, in this "seventh moment" of "racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003) in qualitative research, narrative methods strike particular intonations with Indigenous ways of knowing and doing research.

Indigenous scholars highlight the "four R's" of Relationality, Respect, Relevance, and Reciprocity to address specific qualities of "doing" research with Indigenous people (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). Indigenous scholars explain that a researcher must make sure that the four R's are "guiding the research" (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 86). For Wilson (2001), Indigenous "systems of knowledge are built on the relationships that we have, not just with people or objects, but relationships we have with the cosmos, with ideas, concepts and everything around us" (p. 177). Making music opens up epistemological issues around research as creative, *relational* processes—that is, how things are always in relationships and connected (Wilson, 2001).

Art and creative acts are central concepts here. From Indigenous research perspectives, rather than relying on scientific epistemologies, knowledge is approached through the arts, creativity, the senses and intuition (Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2003, 2001). Douglas Cardinal (1996) spoke of the power of creativity for Indigenous people, noting that "we always did things beautifully... art was not a separate world in our language, it was the way we lived" (p. 13). Cardinal added that First Nations Elders continue to encourage an attitude of artistry, even in this technological age, and youth should "face the future with a computer in one hand and a drum in the other" (cited in Kenny, 1998, p. 79). This statement aptly describes processes of creative remixing in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, where Aboriginal youth are making music using computers.

Kenny (1998) also presented an epistemological notion or qualitative "sense of art" among Indigenous people that is a vital part of survival and holistic wellness. For many First Nations people, songs and dance are the essence of spiritual life which "provide the foundation for our autonomy, solidarity, self-determination and the means

for keeping our spirit alive" (Kenny, 1998, p. 77-78). Along these lines, Dissanayke (1992) claimed that the arts are not merely life-enriching, they are life-sustaining, and as necessary as food. Highwater (1981) wrote, "Art is the staple of humanity... Art is so urgent, so utterly linked with the pulse of feeling in people, that it becomes the singular sign of life when every other aspect of civilization fails" (p. 15). Viewed as a transformative and life-affirming force, arts-based research provides an appropriate axiology for researchers (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) working with Indigenous people. Indigenous epistemologies offer participatory and participant perspectives that value:

> an embodied and moral commitment on the part of the researcher to the members of the community with whom he or she is working. This kind of research is characterized by the absence of the researcher's need to be in control. Such a commitment reflects the researcher's desire to be connected to and be a part of moral community. The researcher's goal is compassionate understanding. (Denzin, 2003, p. 6)

More than simply providing "a method," remixology reflects a commitment to understanding the complex methodological issues of working with young people (Bennett, 2003; Dimitriadis, 2001a). This necessitates paying specific attention to power relationships between the researcher and researched, the impact of technology of communication and information systems upon ways of conducting and authoring research, and the importance of flexible, non-threatening fieldwork strategies that value the interests of young people (Bennett, Cieslik, & Miles, 2003). These concerns speak to the development of a more participative methodology, one which opens up

"communicative action spaces" (Percy-Smith & Weil, 2003) for negotiating and building rapport and trust with young people, and through which youth carry, maintain, or gain some sense of power and agency.

Remixology in The Beat of Boyle Street

Remixology, as an idiom for doing qualitative research, provides opportunities for dialogue in shared contexts, spaces for building and bridging relationships between the researcher and participants, hearing and valuing young peoples' voices, and creating opportunities for surprises and artistic innovation. Given the pervasive stereotypes of urban Aboriginal youth, my research methods of "remixology" arose from recognition of the need to value the voices of youth who have traditionally been silenced. I additionally sought to think through "alternative" types of research "fieldwork" and presentation, such as making rap music, spoken-word poetry, dance mixes, and soundscapes (Cohen & Ainley, 2000).

Ermond (2003) claimed that researchers need to do more than simply state a method as a procedure to follow. She contends that research reporting involves a kind of "commitment to the reader" to describe the "processes of the research, how access and relationships were granted and built and the impact that the research has had on those taking part" (Ermond, 2003, p. 103). The following section describes how I have conducted or "orchestrated" my research in *The Beat of Boyle Street* as an emergent and "artistic" process.

There is no prescriptive way or method for making a musical remix. The audio production software[2] we use to create remixes is nearly as limitless as our imaginations.

Often, we begin creating remixes using pre-recorded looped samples (segments of songs that will repeat in time "endlessly" when played in a cycle, i.e., a "loop"). For example, one participant's remix (this "remixologist" goes by the nickname "Patches") was composed of samples from a Tupac Shakur rap song "Changes" (itself a remix of the "Bruce Hornsby & The Range" song "That's just the way it is") and a country tune "Makin' believe" by Merle Haggard and George Jones[3] **[CD Track 12]**. The young man who created this somewhat jarring, yet innovative juxtaposition dubbed the style "thug country." The composition creatively blended his interests in urban "hardcore" rap and the kinds of country music he grew up listening to on his First Nations reserve in rural Alberta. Working together, we shared stories as we previewed and selected songs to cut into samples. We asked one another questions: How did we connect with *this* song? How did *that* song evoke childhood places? Why remix such seemingly disparate styles? In what ways did both songs share meanings around struggling with hope, dreams, and illusions of a better life? In what ways did our remix both subvert and reproduce these meanings? We shared a laugh as we heard the results of our creative processes. We experimented with special effects, different song arrangements, and other sampled beats and rhythms. When he was sufficiently pleased with the sonic results, "Patches" created a compilation CD including our "thug country remix" and other favorites to play over the weekend for his friends. I made a copy for myself too.

Other types of compositions feature simple beats or drum loops over which we will record spoken word poetry or rhyming raps. Some remixes we have made include samples of city sounds captured on portable recorders and edited into our compositions. Other sounds, such as video game music, cell phone ring tones, old vinyl records, and

spoken dialogue from movies are all fair game for remixing, as these sounds evoke or evince relationships, memories, desires, and simple curiosities expressed by the young people in the music program.

Music is important because of "what it awakens or evokes" in a listener, how it "creates meanings, how it can heal, and what it can teach, incite, inspire or provoke" (Bochner & Ellis, 2003, p. 507). While many young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street* may not necessarily want to sit down and talk about how angry or frustrated they are, they may really want to rap about it, or select a set of songs that articulate their feelings. Making music allows a different kind of expressive space, and affords a different kind of power than, for instance, interviewing, creating a different kind of dialogue. Musical compositions and sounds, in this sense, are understood as expressive rather than explanatory.

For example, a verse by Boyle Street rapper MC "El Jefe" articulates the power and potential of making rap remixes and embodying hip-hop style **[CD Track 13]**. He rhymed:

Violence don't solve shit

Silence ain't shit either.

What the fuck's up with that?

So I spit ether.

People tell me to talk it out

What the fuck they talking about?

I ain't getting' bullied

'cause I'm the first Native you've seen with a bulletproof hoodie.

El Jefe's rap expresses a raw frustration: What can he do with his anger? Neither violence nor silence helps, and talking it out doesn't provide solutions to the hard realities of his life, such as being bullied. Rapping—"spitting ether"—works for him, because rap offers a way to survive in the inner city, presenting a rough "don't mess with me" attitude through spoken rhymes and hip-hop style, such as wearing an oversize "hoodie" sweatshirt popularized by famous rappers like Eminem, 50 Cent, and Tupac Shakur.

Confronted with austere poverty, homelessness, disintegration of families, widespread drug use and abuse, and rampant racism and discrimination, rap music is an expressive outlet and leisure pastime for many Aboriginal youth (Efron, 2001; Hollands, 2004). As leisure, rap operates as a powerful vehicle for young people to express their feelings of anger and tell their own stories. Music provides routes for young people to express their innermost desires and make changes in their own lives, while still controlling the means of that expression and change. El Jefe's rap represents a potent remix of his personal narrative rhymes, interwoven with musical samples from the hip-hop artists he admires and draws upon for inspiration, "coolness," and in this case, the ability to present the world with a tough attitude in order to survive (Dimitriadis, 2001b).

Breaking the silence

In another example, a young woman who goes by "LiGhTsWiTcH" created a spoken word poem titled "Broken Home" that expresses the consequences of continual violence and silencing. This composition represents a basic, yet starkly powerful remix featuring just her voice overlaying a sparse drum loop that we faded in and out to begin and end the composition **[CD track 14]**:

Broken home full of anger and pain

Full of bruises and cuts and beer and such

Full of suicidal thoughts and murderous minds

Full of drugs and slaps and punches thrown

Full of greed and hurt and full of unknown sitters

And misunderstanding shit

Full of rape and no freedom to get away

Full of dishonesty and mistrust

Full of racism and hate

Full of screams and shouts and "get the hell out's"

Full of sex and loud music and parties every night

Then suddenly, its over, it all comes to an end...

When the littlest one pulls a gun to her head.

LiGhTsWiTcH's spoken word poem helps her to begin to share her story and heal, while it simultaneously provokes and invites the listener into her world. She uses music to articulate her struggles with homelessness and living in group homes, addictions and drug use, pain and loss. In her other compositions, she also celebrates all night "after hours" clubs as spaces of musical solace and community away from difficulties at home, sharing a love of song, dance, and building friendships. Through poetry and other creative practices undertaken together—recording soundscapes of inner city alleyways, building a website to display her music and photos, learning to use DJ turntables, and taking field trips to purchase vinyl records—LiGhTsWiTcH taught me about the importance of music in her life, through what she described as "seeing the world from a street kid's perspective." Here are instances through which, in Dimitriadis (2001c) words, "we can,

in our interrogation of rap, broaden out the discussion to include the role of the performers themselves as pedagogues… raising key questions about who needs to be educating whom, and why" (p. 27).

As we conversed, created, and gave back to the community through presentations at youth workshops[4], the roles and lines between LiGhTsWiTcH and me blurred, blending teacher/student, researcher/subject, and artist/researcher locations (Finley & Knowles, 1995; Nayak, 2003). Sharing our stories of music involved an "openness, emotional engagement, and the development of potentially long-term, trusting relationships" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 239). We enacted these processes through sonic creation, production, presentation and "re-presentation." Her spoken word poetry, and our shared audio production with it, opened up powerful spaces for dialogue, healing, listening, and learning.

Turning points

Qualitative researchers such as Conquergood (1998), Lather (2003), Madison (2003), and Bochner and Ellis (2003) have questioned the value of ethnographic research. Lincoln and Denzin (2003) summarily asked: "What is ethnography for? Whom should it serve?" (p. 327). For Lather (2003), ethnographers may best respond by supporting "a politically engaged social science, one that empowers people and changes the world for the better" (Lincoln & Denzin, 2003, p. 327). Of course, another set of questions follows: What is "better"? What "empowers"? And what is meant by being "politically engaged"? In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, I responded to these questions by opening spaces for conversations, debates, and stories (Day-Sclater, 2003). Writing in this regard to the value of arts-based inquiry, Bochner and Ellis (2003) offered:

> the product of research, whether an article, a graph, a poem, a story, a play, a dance, or a painting, [or a song] is not something to be received, but something to be used; not a conclusion but a turn in a conversation; not a closed statement but an open question; not a way of declaring 'this is how it is' but a means of inviting others to consider what it (or they) could become. (p. 507)

Other researchers have sought, instead of "validity," a verisimilitude or the ability to produce or "map" the "real." Ellis (1999) described this as a type of "narrative truth" that has a different type of validity based on a story's ability to "evoke a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p. 674). A story may also take on verisimilitude based on "whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or your very own" (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). In the following narrative rap, "MC Ed Mile" offers this kind of inspiring story or "turn in a conversation" (Bochner & Ellis, 2003), which he has aptly titled "turning point" **[CD track 15]**:

Yo, there's a problem, of an issue
I told you we as Natives can't wipe away with tissue.
An eternal wound and itch too, there isn't a doctor to stitch you.
They ditch you, for the cash, fool.
At least 50% of society is cool
like my man, too
taught me in school, to do what I can to help you.
Who says we can't make a change?

Helping the north, the reserves, in the rural life that's strange.

So we try to identify blocks,

tell people with children "stop smoking rocks!"

And the flocks of life's lost clients

want to relieve the long overdrawn silence

contributing to some sort of alliance

Instead of resorting to violence

'cause that's just a minus.

MC Ed Mile's rap offers insights into the politics, struggles, and dreams of urban Aboriginal youth. I want to focus specifically upon his last five lines. Here, MC Ed Mile identifies "life's lost clients" as those who have traditionally not been heard. He speaks about building alliances with others in order to break the silences of Aboriginal people who have been oppressed and marginalized. He seeks a form of expression that offers routes to changing the world without "resorting to violence." Most importantly, like "El Jefe," these forms offer a way to effect change and speak on his own terms, providing personal and cultural power and agency. While working with MC Ed Mile to produce this rap, I understood how I needed to frame my research in terms of goals which were "no longer emancipation so much as creating some limited freedom for self-production, some limited room for alternative discourses and practices" (Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 10). This passage echoes with both leisure and remixology as bricolage, spaces for "self-production" as music "producers" and bricoleurs of cultures and identities; the blended "mash-up" of musical research and practice.

Conclusion: Sonorous voices, collective stories

The idea of remixology shifts contemporary understandings of qualitative leisure research and requires new lenses or "ears" of interpretation and inquiry. This paper has sounded out some notions around conducting *musical research* representing a bricolage of arts-based, narrative, and performance ethnographies as "remixology" using hip-hop and rap music. It has been argued elsewhere that rapping, as a form of lyrical storytelling, acts as a means of countering negative stereotypes and contesting dominant cultural stories told about young people (Mahiri & Conner, 2003; Rose, 1994). According to Richardson (1997), "at the group level, collective stories help overcome the isolation and alienation of contemporary life and link disparate persons into a collective consciousness" (p. 59). Attuned to personal and collective stories, my work in *The Beat of Boyle Street* responds through musical research to the challenge made by Fox and van Dyck (1997) who asked "how we can learn to listen, to respect and work together with people who have not been listened to in the past" (Conclusion section, para. 2).

The methods presented through remixology offer innovative and relevant concepts for researchers and practitioners to engage and learn *with* young people about leisure, youth identity constructions, and popular cultural practices. Local hip-hop contexts provide vital opportunities for researchers to engage in dialogue with young people, and involve ourselves in their musical life-worlds. Within these opportunities, it is imperative to listen to the views, voices and ideas of young people, valuing their knowledge, experiences and struggles to create cultural meanings and express meaningful identities (Kivel, 1998).

Listening to the voices and ideas of young people are touchstones for my research framework. Research using songs, poetry, and performance as in *The Beat of Boyle Street* offer collective stories and sonorous voices that recognize and include the researcher's own voice and experiences. Entering into the social worlds of participants, researchers "insert ourselves in a web-like world... we trespass against others through words and deeds... we make the world, interrupt what precedes, and may initiate something new altogether" (Orlie, 1994, p. 690). Orlie goes on to claim that researchers "need political space where we 'talk back,' 'answer,' and 'measure up to' what has happened and what we have done, the effects of our location... without this space we are thoughtless, and thus combative, not collaborative" (1994, p. 690). Remixology recognizes the biographical aspects of ethnographic writing, through which the researcher's self is situated in the field, the text, and through performance, in concert with the stories, performances, and voices of those we research. Remixology, the musical research practice of bricolage through which we become sonic bricoleurs, reflects collaborative and creative values and intentions, and offers spaces for collective storytelling through music:

> And so we cobble. We cobble together stories that we may tell each other, some to share our profoundest links with those whom we have studied; some to help us see how we can right a wrong or relieve oppression; some to help us and others to understand how and why we did what we did, and how it all went wrong; and some simply to sing of difference (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998, p. 426).

[1] Over 90% of students at Boyle Street Education Centre report Aboriginal heritage.

[2] We primarily use Sonic Foundry's Sound Forge and Acid Pro, Fruity Loops, and Propellerhead's Reason production software in *The Beat of Boyle Street.* While the software is somewhat specialized, it is loaded on generic computers (PCs) running Microsoft Windows platforms. For a few hundred dollars, nearly anyone with a computer may purchase, install, and use this audio production software.

[3] These compositions "mashed" together create a poignant lyrical collage. For example, Tupac's rap begins: "I see no changes, wake up in the morning and I ask myself, is life worth living or should I blast myself? I'm tired of being poor, and even worse I'm Black…" and incorporates Hornsby's original lyrics for the chorus "That's just the way it is." Patches uses the chorus from "Makin' Believe" to respond to Tupac's verse: "I'm just makin' believe, what else can I do?"

[4] LiGhTsWiTcH presented and facilitated sessions at the 2005 "G.E.T. Fest – Getting Edmonton Together" multicultural youth festival (February 19, 2005). The festival theme was "Stand Together Against Racism" and she spoke to 100 youth about the ways that she has experienced racism, and struggled to break stereotypes of urban Aboriginal youth through music and dance.

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Making an album: A CD track listing "performance text" of *The Beat of Boyle Street* music program

Brett Lashua

Making an album: A CD track listing "performance text" of *The Beat of Boyle Street* music program

Prologue: This research paper provides a kind of performance text (re)presented as the "track listing" of a compilation "album" or a CD insert booklet (the pages that come inside a CD jewel case). According to Denzin (2003), performance texts are concerned with representing the ways that people create, and continue to create themselves through communicative action; "performance puts culture in motion, it performs, narrates, and examines the complex ways in which people experience themselves" (p. 9). My research locates these processes through musical practices. The participants' song lyrics, researcher's journal entries, radio interview transcripts, anecdotes, news clippings, and other sound "samples" provide a partial picture of a three-year musical study undertaken with young people attending an inner city charter high school for youth "at risk." The school—Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC)—is part of a community co-op providing social services for people in need in Edmonton's inner city neighbourhoods. *The Beat of Boyle Street* is a recreational music program for urban youth, ages 14 to 20, predominantly of Aboriginal heritage, attending BSEC. The songs, voices, lyrics, and stories that are created remind us of the struggles, such as racism, poverty, homelessness, disintegration of families, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence that these young people must contend with on a daily basis. The 11 "album tracks" retold here as performance text also articulate the struggles of the researcher to develop a satisfactory means of representing the research—simultaneously musical, poetic, narrative, and performative—and reporting on the processes of the study. These processes included making and sharing music in order to build rapport and respectful relationships, valuing the participants'

popular cultural interests through the music program, and including the perceptions of young people in the research.

Track 1: *How important is music?*

> Brett's journal, September 10, 2002: I just finished my first day at Boyle Street Education Centre. I bolted out of the community co-op, "running the gauntlet" of students, homeless, and unemployed people hanging out and smoking out around the main doors. I do not understand this place, it is like another planet to me. I do not understand what draws them here, these "kids" who, I am told, have fought, failed, and been kicked out of every other school in Edmonton... After lunch today, students set up a CD player in the pool table/recreation area and did traditional Aboriginal dancing to some powwow music while they were playing pool, then switched over to rap music and started breakdancing. Most students were wearing extra-baggy hip-hop clothes and have homemade tattoos all over their hands and arms, one of which proclaims "THUG" down one arm, with a Native spirit circle tattooed on the other... How do these cultures—Aboriginal and urban hip-hop—mix, and *how do I mix in*? I sat there watching the dancing today and felt like I was on another planet...
>
> I don't really yet know what the school expects of me. All I know is that I can teach the students to make music with the computers and audio software, if we can negotiate a way to do it. Already I am amazed at what they have to say, how vocal they are about what their lives have been like, and how determined they seem to be to resist everything: "Fuck this and fuck that and fuck you!" Yet

they are there, in the school, and I wonder: What gives them hope, given all of their struggles? *How important is music*?

Track 2: *Spittin' verse* **[CD Track 16]**

"MC Lil' C" (age 14):

Peace to my Nechies! Peace peace peace! Born in the ghetto like a hustler, street soldier, yeah! [*singing along with Tupac Shakur*] *Something we all adore, the one thing we dying for, nothing but pain, stuck in this game, searching for fortune and fame…*

I grew up in the city, where the sights wasn't pretty, that's because all the gangs in the city. I joined a gang called the West Side Thugs, I was always in trouble with the law, I was just the littlest bad ass that they ever saw. I was just a little street hanger, a gang banger. My life started out with the West Side Thugs. *Something we all adore, the one thing we dying for, nothing but pain, stuck in this game, searching for fortune and fame…*

["Nechi" is a Cree word meaning close friend/brother]

MC "Noizez" (age 17):

Seems like ever since my birth

I've been livin' this Native *muskeegee* curse

Even in my dreams I gotta make this 12-gauge burst

In reality, when I do it, it doesn't seem to hurt

With me, there's no hesitation pulling the trigger first,

It's like I got a blood thirst

For spitting this motherfuckin' verse…

["muskeegee" is a Cree word for "medicine" and alludes to spiritual aspects of someone having "done medicine" on someone.]

N. K. Denzin:

> The current historical moment requires morally informed performance and arts-based disciplines that will help people recover meaning in the face of senseless, brutal violence, violence that produces voiceless screams of terror and insanity. (2003, p. 7)

"West Side Princess" (age 15):

> We the finest right here, we coming right now, straight to you little bitches from e-town. I'm a Native MC, my name is "Destiny" like Tupac said, you can't see me. Cuz I be hittin' 'em up and cuttin' 'em up, yeah. West Side Princess young and in the crew, you wanna fuck with me, Strawberries? Fuck you! Ah, yeah, I'm back again, to tell you little bitches who's gonna win. I'm gonna tell you once again, my name is "Destiny," so don't come around and try to jack me.
>
> ["Strawberries" are a group of young women bullying "Destiny" in her neighbourhood]

"Penny A." (age 15):

> I'm a Native from E-town, showing you whose skin is brown
>
> I'm also from 82nd Street, showing you my beat.
>
> Me and my bro "Destiny", we be gangstas as you can see
>
> We be walking around, looking tough 'cause we rough.

Track 3: *"White" gaze, "red" people* **[CD Track 17]**

"IronLungz" (age 16):

> I just read in the news the other day that since Natives got out of the woods and came into the city all this gang shit's been happening. But it ain't mostly us, man, its all these Asians, these white boys, they all got gangs and shit. But Natives is the ones on the line, you know what I mean? That's what I'm saying, man. But every time they got... it's the same shit cause, they say Natives is the ones knocking all these white folks over, but its white folks that's sweatin' me in my own neighbourhood man, know what I mean?

K. Hollinshead: "Shadow Indians"

> The negative and unbalanced construction of First Americans... [is] a cultural artefact fashioned out of disembodied symbolic elements [in a host of] written and visual forms... It is a fusion of a thousand images of Geronimo, of the magnificent John Wayne, the sterling Gary Cooper, of intrepid forays into enemy scrub, of lone forts, of smoke signals from afar and sinister ambushes in rocky and barren deserts. It is unfettered myth developed at volume by popular literature, dime novels, and pulp adventure magazines. (1992, p. 47)

"Rasta P." (age 18):

> I feel mostly discrimination when I'm coming to this school, getting off the bus, everybody's is just like "what's this kid getting off this bus at this stop all the time for?" They don't know I go to school at Boyle Street. I feel discrimination all the time. Whenever I'm walking down the street with my friends, I'm with a group of

> Natives and we all look—some might say not looking too classy or not too clean—and they all just look at us like "what the hell?"

Brett: Where do you experience discrimination?

"Bigg Dogg" (age 19): Everywhere. I feel discrimination all the time. Just being Native… I don't know.

S. Efron, "Native hip-hoppers rap out their message."

> [There is] a North America-wide trend of young Natives embracing rap music. Hip-hop has overtaken both heavy rock and traditional pow-wow music as the music of choice on the reserves, and many Native MCs, DJs, graffiti artists, and break-dancers are popping up everywhere. It's not surprising given that 56 percent of Canada's aboriginal population is less than 24 years old. Many grow up in poverty and identify with the rap lyrics from the African-American ghettos (2001, para. 3).

Track 4: "*It's something I do*" **[CD Track 18]**

MC "P.A." (age 19):

> I started here at Boyle Street Education about when I was sixteen, and when I was coming here it was, like, it was going good, you know, the people were there for me, but I didn't try hard, you know I ended up dropping out, I ended up doing a lot of things, you know, getting in trouble, whatnot. It took me until now to, like, finally get into it and whatnot. I feel I've come a long way from when I was younger to now. And, it's like, I don't know, I'm a dedicated student now, it's a full time thing, you know… music now, gives me, like now that I'm in this

classroom, and what I've learned here so far, it just gives me a new perspective on music, you know. Like, it just opens up doors you know so I can see where I'm going with it, and it just opens up a lot more doors. It's not just something I listen to anymore, it's something I do. (CBC radio interview, March 10, 2003)

Track 5: *"There's still a life for a G-Girl"*

Brett's Journal, November 14, 2004: Today was "Jazzy-G's" 18th birthday… her younger brother phoned the school for her from the reserve in Cold Lake, but she missed the call during class break, when she was outside for a smoke… missing his call really upset her… we talked a little bit about birthdays, good ones, bad ones, how to make the best of 'em when family is not around… I gave her the portable CD player as a gift that Karen Fox provided for us, and Jazzy-G stayed in music class to make herself a birthday CD, then she spent the rest of the period writing lyrics for a track she called "Why?" **[CD Track 19]**

"MC Jazzy-G": "Why?"

Yo, why?

Why does life play this way?

Why do I still wanna pray?

Why do I still wanna try?

Why do I still wanna cry?

Why do people around me wanna die?

(verse 1)

I guess that's how life plays its role

Lived in skid row, never had an honour roll

My whole family is falling apart

I'm the only who's still at heart

Still am street smart,

Learned from the best, settled my quest.

Friends I've trusted, boy am I frustrated,

Tired of being rated, only close to my family, related,

I love being hated, but sick of being mistreated,

Down and proud of being guided, learned the hard ways of a G attitude,

Misunderstood in my neighbourhood, I hope this shit don't get played out,

Just like my 'hood, labelled ghetto, representing inner-city and gangsta studios of 101

People thinking I'm no one, but for sure, there's still a life for a G-Girl

All my bros know, the hard life of e-city's ghetto, oh yeah…

(verse 2)

Dreams seem to come like failures

I wish I would have got lectures,

There's a war out there

Fear eating me up all inside

There's nowhere, am I gonna hide?

'Cause soon I'll be found, 'cause no time to fool around

Can't shred a sound, sick of downtown

On my own, too old to have some fun

Always loving my mom,

It's hard to hold on

Don't know if I should go on, or let go?

Sick of 107, friends I've seen turning into ho's

But still count them as bro's.

Doors never left open, tired of being rejected,

I turned away, sick of being up for days

To smoke away some of life's problems,

Still learning how to solve 'em,

My whole world revolves around them.

I try to run, it hits me again,

Sick of pain, knowing my life will never be the same.

It'll never, ever be the same…

["Gangsta studios of 101" refers to a youth centre on 101st St. with a music recording program. The line with "107" refers to 107th Ave, an area known for prostitution]

Tupac Shakur, "Changes":

That's just the way it is. Things will never be the same.

Diversi, M: "Glimpses of street life"

I decided that I did not want to represent these street kids' experiences from a theoretical perspective, for that would inevitably bury their voices beneath layers of analysis… I decided to transgress the boundaries of traditional forms of writing in the social sciences… by representing the kids I met in my fieldwork through

the short story genre. Based on my field notes and on reconstructions of lived experiences I shared with the kids, I employed short story techniques such as alternative points of view, dialogue, unfolding action, and flashback, to attempt to recreate the tension, suspense, delay, and voice that compose a good short story and are inseparable from lived experience. (1998, p. 132)

Track 6: *A day in the life*

Brett's Journal, September 23, 2004: The room overflows with music, too much for me to keep in touch with. The new room—with six workstations—is being used wonderfully. In the first group today, we divided time in the back vocal "isolation" area for "Steve" to record some rhymes, then we recorded the school's principal playing a traditional flute for a soundtrack for a film for the video class... after that, "LiGhTsWiTcH" had time to use the new turntables to do some mixing... outside in the main area, "Demonis" added a synthesized mandolin line to his song, which he declared is for his "second album." I asked "what was on your *first*?" oh, that one is *going to be* for all hard, tough songs, and will be called "trauma"... this prettier song is for album #2, to be called "galaxia"! "MC Daddy" had a great remix of 4 songs going, which he had slowed parts of to the rate of cold molasses, juxtaposed with sections sped up to sound like furious chipmunks. Another student, "G. Mack" was cutting audio loops and continually asking me to "approve" of his edits—they're great! All heavy Goth music, which we're going to mix with his loops made from Elvis songs.

The second 80-minute period was even more hectic, as we divided time in the vocal isolation room between "MC Jazzy-G" working on her raps, then she switched spaces so "MC Noizez" could try recording some of his raps... meanwhile, in between vocal takes, "Kree-Azn" was in the room doing some serious scratching on the turntables, as he had brought in some "old school" vinyl to spin (James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, etc.)... now in the main room, Jazzy-g had switched over to using Reason audio software, mixing in a sample (all of 20 minutes old!) of the principal's flute sounds into her song. "West Side Princess" was working to help another student, "Penny A." do a remix in the Acid Pro audio software. "Patches" and his girlfriend were downloading music and making compilation CDs of favourite "love songs" for one another... "J.J." (a breakdancer or "B-Boy") was finishing his first-ever remix for a dance routine for Saturday night and kept pulling me out into the hall to count off beats for him while he worked through his break dance routines. We made six counts of four and headed back into the room to make the cuts where he needed them—he's learning the software quickly... meanwhile, I was also on the phone trying to finalize our plans for the "Dreamcatcher" Aboriginal youth workshops we're doing next month at Grant McEwan: four students will co-facilitate two 75 minute workshops, teaching break dance in one room, and audio production/rapping in another.

At the start of the lunch period, "Bigg Dogg" stopped in to burn a CD of his remixes. Kree-Azn started teaching "MC Daddy" how to scratch with vinyl on the turntables. "Demonis" came back around to continue his "galaxia" project.

MC Daddy's partner dropped in and started doing a remix too… Jazzy-G printed off some new lyrics she's written and rehearsed them in the middle of the room to all within earshot. The room filled with sounds again as students finished eating lunch and had 45 minutes to work on music, and it was difficult for me to extract myself to leave for the university at 1:00 pm… There is such passion for music…

Track 7: *The poetics and politics of representation*

MC Novakane (age 19): "My Natives" [**CD Track 20**]

This is for my Natives…

My playerz, my Natives…

Someone get me off of this shit…

My heartbeat's a scream, to know this is just a dream,

The teardrop's my eye, the weed helps me fly,

Mama always told that life brings the wild,

I can't stop thinking ' will I ever hold a child?'

Got homeys in the cage always counting the days,

Burn a little sage to complete my prayers,

To be honest with the truth, I wanna help the youth,

The reservation like a 'hood, my rhymes are me and you.

Why am I drinking, always thinking 'What's wrong?'

Givin' a little a heart and keepin' myself strong,

In my mind I'm a chief, for real I got some beats,

I wanted to be the man to knock out Custer's teeth.

Give me a holler I'll show the world I care,

From redskins to black, get me off this welfare,

Creator all I ask is embrace me with a hug,

To my people from me to you, would you pray for a thug?

So let me say this once, to death I'm a soldier,

Hold back my pocketbook, the world's getting colder,

For real, Native, listen to what I told ya,

For any Native ladies dressing babies let me hold ya.

Right and wrong, is 24/7,

And if I die, and which I will, it stays in heaven,

So all I really know is: Are you down with me?

Give me your hand, and I'll be taking back this land,

Yeah, my Natives… uh uh uh, my Natives… my Natives…

Come on… my Natives.

E. Hooper, "Author gives hip-hop a bad rap." *St. Petersburg Times*, March 7, 2005:

> 'The point is that there are a lot of people out there now who think hip-hop ... is politics,' McWhorter explained. 'That this music promises some sort of second civil rights revolution. They have a serious problem. As far as I'm concerned, it's about as important as disco,' McWhorter told 300 people at the Grand Hyatt. 'It's no more revolutionary than, for example, *Stayin' Alive*.'

Track 8: *"Hip-hop made me"* **[CD Track 21]**

"Kree-Azn" (age 20):

Hip-hop made me the person who I am today. I think I'd be selling drugs, I'd be in jail, or either I'd probably be dead right now without out that stuff. And I'm not one of those gangstas, I'm not a negative person, I'm straight-up positive. Yeah, that's who I be, I'm half Native and half Vietnamese. So, my boy was sitting there, and he knew that I was half Native and half Asian, he was like, 'yo, you know what would be a sick name for you? Kree-Azn' You know? Like, a word 'creative', like 'creation' or two races that click together, you know, like, it does the same thing with hip-hop, like, there's no certain race you have to be in hip-hop, there's no certain skin color, it's all about what's inside you, the creativity.

Track 9: *Crime Spree/Rhyme Spree*

Rebecca Leigh Fox: "Hip-Hop's Bad Rap," *Psychology Today* (December 2, 2004)

"Summary: Teenagers who listen to hardcore rap may be more likely to use drugs, commit crimes and join street gangs than teens who listen to softer music."

"MC Rasta P" (age 18). "Rhyme Spree" **[CD Track 22]**

[The blind stares of a million pairs of eyes looking hard but won't realize that they will never see…] Rasta P! [G-G-G-G-G-G-G-Unit!]

Yeah, gotta love that, some people just don't even know man… recognize…

Half-breed Native, born and raised,

To this day I still drink and blaze,

Get high and fucked up to rid my mind,

Of all the bullshit in my past behind…

(verse 1)

Yo, some Natives can't even get out of their own fucking position,

To kill the pain, go out and get drunk, is their only mission

I love the people looking for love in all the wrong places,

Got 'em making babies, trying to hustle cash, got 'em catching cases.

Already a lot of nechies in jail, man I don't wanna fail

With all the freedom I remind myself I ain't even living well.

Sometimes breakfast, sometimes supper, sometimes a snack here and there,

A lot of kids going wild since their parents don't even care.

I try to stay focused, make something happen like hocus-pocus

Stick to this rap thing 'cause like mary jane it's the dopest.

No hood rat, no mall rat, I'm past all that,

Believe me, entrepreneur coming up in this game,

Y'all know my name, Rasta P. it shouldn't change, it's still the same.

(verse 2)

Yeah, I had a lot of family and friends, but in the end I was all alone,

Try to ask the man in the mirror, get the same answer from my clone.

Should have known my own reflection will show me no direction.

My advice? Learn from mistakes; don't think you can have perfection.

Always trying to do my best, putting the rest to rest

Cause all the stress makes me restless like my head's compressed.

Getting full of all these sick thoughts, these feelings I'm just shedding,

Like peelings across the ceiling, you don't even know how I'm feeling man,

I'm just feeling rough, feeling fucking rugged and raw,

Can't still be thugged out and staying away from the law,

The Lord helps me out in this world cause it's hard,

When the darkness lays man, it's so hard, it's fucking fog…

S. Best and D. Kellner:

> Rap articulates the experiences and conditions of living in a spectrum of marginalized situations ranging from racial stereotyping and stigmatizing to struggle for survival in violent ghetto conditions. In this cultural context, rap provides a voice to the voiceless, a form of protest to the oppressed, and a mode of alternative cultural style and identity to the marginalized. Rap is thus not only music to dance and party to, but a potent form of cultural identity. It has become a powerful vehicle for cultural political expression. (1999, Section 1, Para. 1)

Track 10: "*that's how I guess we connect*"

"MC Jazzy-G":

> If it wasn't for having programs as good as this is, I think I would be still running on the streets, probably still getting high or drunk. Other than that, nowadays, I'm laying down the beats, spitting the lyrics, laying down some sweet tracks. Most the teenagers here live in poverty, and coming to school at Boyle Street is like our dreams come true, we can be heard by doing performances, thanks to the teachers for all their work and time and for believing in us when no one else would. Plus, it's the students who make it happen. It's so amazing to be heard, it's the best feeling. We can actually be heard and valued for our talents, like, we have so much talent, with underground rappers, we have break dancers, we got artists for

all elements of hip hop, we got graffiti artists, we got DJs up in here, and like its so dope. Students here actually want to go to school, this music class is the main reason why I go to school, this school gives me hope to believe. Everyone here is different in their own special way. Thanks to Brett-n-'John'-n-'Cheryl' for believing in all of us and what we are good at. And that's how I guess we connect, either through the lyrics of MCs, grafing, dancing, DJs. (extract from interview with "Urbanology magazine: Voice for the voiceless")

['John' and 'Cheryl' are other arts/options teachers at BSEC]

"MC ED Mile" (age 21) **[CD Track 23]**:

I used to be a pugilist, solve my problems with fists, but that's in the midst, you know? So I took it to passion and fashion and started writing rhyme after rhyme through poetry on loose-leaf line. This is what I like to do, I don't commit no crime, though my people are behind bars at the Remand doing time. But, I just keep doing my passion you know? And just keep going, keep going…

I'm a 6'3" treaty Cree standing here with the glasses, used to have a goatee. But, a little representation on me, this is my hip-hop philosophy: Who likes to talk about violence, I put that in silence, that's a minus, put that all behind us. I'm that 6'3" Cree, and I'll be here way past 2003, ya know? See me on MTV, maybe, battling an MC (CBC radio interview, March 10, 2003).

[The "Remand" Centre is an Edmonton facility where men and women are held in custody prior to the completion of their trial.]

Track 11: *Remixology*

> Brett's Journal, December 23, 2004: It's Christmas break, and [former participant] "Bigg Dogg" had the week off from his multimedia course too, so after an exchange of e-mails last week, we made plans for him to come over to my apartment to work on music this evening, which he calls "remixology"... it was great to hang out with him again, making new remixes, talking about life... creating, sharing, learning... I hope to maintain the relationship we have, even as we head off in new directions... keep doing the "remixology"...

Postscript

The Beat of Boyle Street is a musical recreation program and research study that engages with young people through making music, remixes, raps, spoken-word poetry, and hip-hop dance tracks using computers and audio production software. The program is a collaboration between the University of Alberta and an inner city chartered high school operating within a community co-op providing social services to people in need. The program is designed as a re-engagement strategy for students attending the school as well as my doctoral research into popular culture and the musical leisure practices of urban youth.

Over 90% of the participants in the school report Aboriginal heritage. In Canada, Aboriginal people comprise about 4.4% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2001). Of that number, a little over half (51%) are living in major cities, such as Edmonton, where the urban Aboriginal population is also about 4.4% (Statistics Canada, 2001). Nationwide, the Aboriginal population is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population, and as noted by Efron (2001), over 56% of Canada's Aboriginal people are

under 24 years old. The resulting picture may be described as largely one of a young, urban group of people. With that in mind, popular cultural leisure practices, particularly rap and hip-hop music, should be considered as highly relevant research contexts for engaging with Aboriginal youth cultures. Rap music takes on further dimensions for young people in light of the continuing economic, social, and political marginality of Canada's Indigenous people. In other words, rap music is the voice through which Aboriginal youth often choose to express themselves and their views of the world (Efron, 2001; Hollands, 2004).

I opted to represent the research in this paper as a CD "track listing" because in *The Beat of Beat Street* research "data" primarily has taken the form of the songs created by the young people attending the charter school. Each day, some participants made their own CD recordings of a variety of compositions, including songs they have created, downloaded and compiled, or remixed. It follows that an appropriate and relevant format for representing this work would be as the "liner notes" or "track listing" that comes in the CD jewel case. I contend that this type of "poetic" (e.g., lyrics), "fictional" representation, or "performance text" offers a more accessible and compelling way of "retelling" the stories of the people involved in the research (Diversi, 1998; Richardson, 1997; Sparkes, 2002; Torres, 2003). That is, the form syncs with how the research operated in ways that convey what other forms of writing cannot.

For instance, Baff (1997) chose to represent her doctoral research as a poem. She argued that poetry was an appropriate form of representation because reading poems engaged the reader in processes similar to those of participants in the context of her study—a literature program. My research involves making music and collating songs,

spoken word poetry, stories, and remixes on CD media. Thus, representing the data as a "track listing" engages the reader through the senses as pieces of music, a compilation "mixed CD," or "album" of selected tracks. This representational form echoes a variety of "new" research conceptualizations in ethnographic work, in which a:

> veritable explosion of 'messy' forms—plays, poems, performance pieces and ethnodramas; fictional representations; 'skirted,' 'pleated,' and 'layered' texts; and autoethnographies—all meant to be read out loud, performed, or savored as literature and community stories, has reshaped entirely the debates around 'appropriate' scientific discourse, the technical and rhetorical conventions of scientific writing, and the meaning of research itself. (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003, p. 7)

In another example, Conrad (2004) used "Popular Theatre" and created performance texts in her research with rural Aboriginal youth "at risk" as a qualitative method that was "both participatory and performative," and offered "alternative ways to engage participants in doing research" (p. 3). Conrad claimed that performative, participatory research constructed a "counter-narrative that interrupts the 'common sense' or taken-for-granted understandings of 'at-risk,' providing a more complex picture... [of] youths' choice to engage in risky behaviour, the enjoyment they gain from it and its resistant quality – its potential to undermine unjust social structures" (p. 19). I appreciate these tensions and complexities as they relate to scenes of rap and hip-hop, particularly where my research sought to complicate or extend understandings of popular music in young people's everyday lives. This was particularly evident as young people employed rap styles (invariably harder, edgier styles such as "gangsta" rap) to project a kind of

toughness or "don't mess with me" attitude they deemed necessary to survive when almost all else around them was failing.

I have attempted to show how rap lyrics, stories, personal reflections, quotes, and poetry spill over boundaries, blend together, resonate, resound, and "remix" to create a performance text that is limited and partial, yet evocative and expressive of the spaces of *The Beat of Boyle Street*. Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) describe these spaces as intersections "where people can find some shared language and overlapping interests. It is, at best, a borderland space, constructed and maintained through dialogue among border crossers" (p. 31). The 11 tracks represented through this paper reverberate with this passage as a way of bringing multiple voices, often on different trajectories and from opposing perspectives into dialogue across the borders and boundaries of rap music and youth leisure practices.

Leisure often provides important spaces for telling stories, expressing emotions, finding moments of solace and healing, disrupting established meanings, and connecting across and honouring differences (Fox & van Dyck, 1997). Leisure operates within a contested landscape/soundscape where identities, cultures, meanings, and power are brought into play. Hip-hop music speaks to the personally embodied, culturally expressive, and socially embedded aspects of leisure—a form of "poetics" performed through "flowing" rap lyrics and spray-painted graffiti, breakdanced to "soulful" beats, seen and felt as the rumble of deep bass frequencies on car stereos "cruising" through city neighbourhoods. These poetics are infused with, and are expressive of, the "politics" of youth cultures, including intersections of race, place, class, gender, and style (Skelton & Valentine, 1998).

Leisure practices, such as making music and rapping, are part and parcel of a terrain of social meanings that provide researchers, educators, and practitioners with "windows" into the everyday lives of young people. In these spaces, understandings of the world and relationships with it are, in part, simultaneously resisted, reproduced, reworked, and rewritten. As researchers, educators, and practitioners, we need interpretive lenses, methods, and analytical frameworks that aid us in engagements in leisure contexts with young people. Along these lines, Richardson (1994) issued a challenge for thinking and writing about theory and research:

> In standard social scientific writing, the metaphor for theory is that it is a 'building.' Consider a different metaphor for theory. Write a paragraph about theory using your metaphor. Do you 'see' differently and 'feel' differently about theorizing when you use an unusual metaphor? (p. 524)

Her question "What if we used a different metaphor?" invites researchers to explore new theoretical angles, considers different modes of representation, and opens spaces for new stories and different interpretations of leisure. It is useful, therefore, to think *with* ideas of leisure and music *through* metaphors of remixes and compilation albums.

Making a compilation album is a political event, a process of infusing new meanings and interweaving multiple political statements through the selection of content—e.g., a compilation of classical songs "says" something quite different than one of country songs, or a grouping of country *and* classical. This example identifies some issues around recognising what researchers choose to include in written representations of their studies. Though my "researcher self" is present in the text as journal entries, I am—somewhat less visibly—also the "producer," "arranger," or "remixologist"

responsible for selecting and orchestrating the track listing itself. I have included pieces that, when read together, retell and represent as accurately as possible the performances, stories, processes, and issues involved in the research as I have understood them. Like any compilation album or any research report, the selection of content speaks directly to the politics, complexities, and struggles of representation.

My "voice" in this composition also takes the form of personal journal passages, first reflecting on the moments of my entry into the research as a white, middle-class, suburban, 29 year old, male, doctoral student. The middle journal entry describes "typical" moments after the program was well established and enjoying a recently provided "music room" in a new school space. Days such as these were creative whirlwinds, and I found myself swept along in the passion that young people have for music. It was a wonderful experience, getting to "hang out and make music with young people" four hours a day, four days a week. Along the way, I attempted to maintain a delicate balancing act of gently instructing the students in audio production while allowing participants to have creative control of their music as "audio engineers" and "producers" themselves. Later, I described how a student maintained contact with me after he had left the school, through e-mail messages, and meeting over school breaks at my apartment for "remixology" sessions. This progression demonstrates some aspects of the successes I had building respectful and reciprocal relationships in the program.

Certainly there were students with whom I was unable to connect, those who had little desire to make their own music, or those who simply didn't have space for the program in their lives at the moment. Some of these young people are the ones I will remember most vividly. Early on in the project, one young woman recorded her own rap

song during the few days she attended the school. Across the three years of my research, I occasionally saw her around downtown, in the City Centre mall, or late at night in a 24-hour café in the inner city. While it was clear she continued to struggle with "street life," we always greeted each other with a smile and recited a few lines from her song to one another, before then chatting about how we were doing. She continued to write lyrics and express herself musically. Within the limited time we shared, rap helped to establish our relationship, and opened the doors to further conversations, beyond rap.

Some of my most cherished moments during the research were in support of participants during public performances, celebrations, and civic ceremonies (e.g., National Aboriginal Day). Many of these events included audiences of students' peers and families, BSEC faculty, and city, provincial, and federal government officials. At one such event, a high-ranking federal minister danced along as she was "serenaded" with a student's rap performance. These moments were pivotal, as the participants in *The Beat of Boyle Street* were educating adults, becoming hip-hop pedagogues, challenging stereotypes of inner city Aboriginal youth, representing themselves through rap stories and break dance, and "conversing" with people in positions of power regarding issues that are relevant in their lives. Weiner (2003) wrote, that in this, young people and educators (and I would add *researchers*) might collaboratively:

> participate in the production and disruption of knowledge/power, and in a cartographic process of mapping what might appear to be disparate cultural practices. These pedagogical projects are meant to instigate and provoke, just as they are meant to give students the tools needed to critically break and break into the continuity of dominant and

> established representations. From questioning common sense and identifying dominant social formations to interrogating identity constructions and the normalizing discourses of established power, students are involved in working in the spaces of political, social, and cultural relations. (p. 57)

This passage echoes Carlson and Dimitriadis (2004) in how *The Beat of Boyle Street* operates within "borderlands." Anzaldúa (1994) described these spaces as social worlds between academic research and artistic communities providing intertwined narrative and poetic texts in which theory is embedded. *The Beat of Boyle Street* provided opportunities to get to know young people through music, hear their voices, stories, and perspectives. Lyrics, experiences, and knowledge were shared, conversations were opened, talents and skills were valued, created, and explored, and we were able to respect, connect, and create across our differences. Like Carol Smith (2005), I hope that sharing this text "will lift up their voices," celebrate the wonders of musical creativity, and yet remind us that there is still much (leisure) work to do (p. 156).

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'Just another Native'? Soundscapes, chorasters, and borderlands

Brett D. Lashua

'Just Another Native'? Soundscapes, Chorasters, and Borderlands

> The impact of the visual is so overwhelming that we sometimes forget that it has been accompanied by a cultural revolution almost as ubiquitous. This is the revolution in *sound.* (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Nagus, 1997, p. 19)

Introduction

Soundscape 1 **[CD Track 24]**: *We're walking slowly and recording city sounds along 101st Street, in the centre of downtown, on our way to Churchill subway station when "MC Ed Mile" raps: "I'm walking down one-oh-one, freestyling, going buck wild," then stumbling to find some rhyming phrases, he adds "I'm kinda thinking dumb, but that's okay 'cause I'm in the middle of the inner-city slum! What are we gonna do? We're going to, like, roll to the beat of an invisible drum." Traffic, footsteps, subway trains, speech, city rhythms: These are our "invisible" drums. We scribble down keywords about things around us, scratching with a pencil in a notebook: "Businessmen with cell phones look at us funny" and then "buses rumble." MC Ed Mile reads nearly every sign, and checks out every car, incorporating the words and images into his rhyming rap as we amble along: "I'm a 6'3" treaty Cree in the goatee, pants saggin' and draggin', looking like the rear end of a 1978 Ford station wagon." As an urban Aboriginal youth, he senses racism, at certain times "because of my clothing, how I'm walking, how I'm talking." He slips into rhyme: "I wear funny clothes, I hit you with low blows, I got mad flows." Sometimes, he adds, people stereotype him because of the color of his skin: "At times its like, its like, 'cause they see a Native guy they think I'm gonna ask them for money. Like, I had this stereotype just a couple days ago. I was walking down the street, and went up to ask this lady a question. I was like, 'um, I was wondering if you could*

help me out?' and she was like 'no no, I got nothing!' and I'm like 'hold on man, you never even listened to the question yet. I just wanted to interview you about what you thought about Churchill Station!'"

We loop through the underground pedways that link the City Centre Mall to the subway stations, yelling "tribal riders" loudly to capture our echoing and reverberating voices. In Churchill Station, MC Ed Mile declares he's going to create a freestyle rap about all ten of the subway stations, and we board the trains and record the voice that announces each station as we ride along: University, Grandin, Corona, Bay, Central, Churchill, Coliseum, Stadium, Belevedere, Clareview. MC Ed Mile raps into the recorder:

Check it, check it, I'm a scrub with a bus pass, yo, for real, check it.
Known all the way from north, east, south and west, I'm the best,
Put the rest in cardiac arrest, bringing something down from diversity,
Heard all the way from Southgate, and Whyte Ave. and University,
My priority, being the minority, pants sagging, dragging,
Lookin' like the rear end of a Ford station wagon,
Graffiti marker for taggin', see me braggin' off the top,
'cause I drop it down with the graffiti, writing rhymes all the time,
Down on plans at brandin' Grandin, understand how I be handin',
Walking like a loner, walking by the Corona with the Money Mart, got the heart,
Add to the hip-hop charts with the work of art,
Freestyle nice, twice as nice, on the microphone device, I'll make myself so precise,
Bringing it back like that all day, hear what I got to say,

Politicians listen to what I have, swiftly with the crowd by Bay.

Scrub with a bus pass, scrub with a bus pass, yo, scrub with a bus pass,

Yo that's me, that's me, yo that's me, six foot three treaty Cree in the goatee,

Known around with my flow from the 780.

Scrub with a bus that's me, bring it back like that.

Getting mental with the pencil, heard all around Central, evidental,

'cause I got mad skill, heard from Boyle Street, and I Human, and Churchill

when I thrill, spill, over the off the top,

Going to your cranium, like I be speaking Ukrainian, but how can that be when I'm Aboriginal-Canadian?

Release some stress at the Stadium, when I bench-press,

When I'm all feeling messed, don't try and test,

'cause I take all on lock, take your scalp off with a 1978 tomahawk,

Get your cheque docked, smashed up like Georges Laraque, flock, like that,

New and clear, 66th street and Belvedere, how I steer,

A nechi heard on MTV can't wait and hold it down for 2003.

[We laugh as we realize that he forgot to include Coliseum and Clareview stations!][1]

Later, we will use audio production software to sample from and edit the city sounds we've recorded, including his rap, into a soundscape composition. A soundscape is an aural collage, created by juxtaposing, overlapping, and mixing a variety of recorded and "found" sounds together. Soundscapes, according to du Gay et al. (1997), refer not only to the "actual" sounds of the world, but also to the meanings, feelings, and

associations that occur in the "landscape of the mind" (p. 20). Portable digital recorders allow the sounds from everyday life—streets, cafes, subway stations, and voices—to be recorded, stored, and transferred into a computer with relative ease. Using audio software, MC Ed Mile and I build a complex soundscape by adding layers of city sounds into his freestyle rap, integrating the sounds from the subway trains and including the station announcements, and lastly mixing in a hip-hop drum beat throughout the track. Together, these components create a type of music that expresses aspects of MC Ed Mile's life, telling a part of his story, not only through what the soundscape "says" as a text, but, more so, through the process of how it was made. This paper is about that process.

As an artist/researcher/teacher/collaborator with young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, this process provides me with ways of critically listening, thinking, and being in a shared, borderland cultural space with youth. hooks (1994) argued that "when we desire to decolonize minds and imaginations, cultural studies' focus on popular culture can be and is a powerful site for intervention, challenge, and change" (p. 4). The students' music (soundscape and otherwise) challenges me—a university educated, white, middle-class, 30-something-year-old man—to consider the representation of difference through sound and the production of meaning as it is articulated in young people's everyday lives. Different representations reveal new possibilities of opening creative, expressive, and transformative spaces:

> We are articulating new positions in these in-between Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academies... in our literature, social issues such as race, class, and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative

> and poetic elements of a text, elements in which theory is embedded. (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv-xxvi)

As a recreational activity, creating soundscapes act as performances in which "the performative becomes an act of doing, an act of resistance, a way of connecting the biographical, the pedagogical, and the political" (Giroux, 2001a, p. 134-135, quoted in Denzin, 2003, p. 14). Soundscapes make audible the sites of oppression that Denzin (2003) notes are made visible through performance.

The Beat of Boyle Street

The Beat of Boyle Street is a recreation-based music project created in collaboration between the University of Alberta and an inner city charter school that seeks to re-engage "at risk," predominantly Aboriginal youth, ages 14 to 20, who have had difficulty in other schools. The majority of these young people are living in poverty and confronting other challenges ranging from learning disabilities, drug addictions, teen parenting, poor parenting, racism, violence, homelessness and the vicissitudes of life "on the streets." This project begins with questions about what young people have to say about their lives as they express themselves through music, popular culture, and leisure.

Popular culture is a powerful and complex site for the exploration of leisure. The young people participating in *The Beat of Boyle Street* make substantial investments in music and popular culture as expressions of their identities and social relationships. The project builds upon this base by teaching young people how to produce their own music using computers and audio production software. The power of leisure in this context resides in allowing participants the freedom and creative space to express their hopes,

dreams, frustrations, and experiences of the world in their own voices. In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, making music is a recreational activity that young people *do*.

This "doing" is important for a number of reasons. First, soundscapes act as types of performance narratives (Denzin, 2003) created by young people that are expressive of the ways that they understand themselves and their place in the world around them. Narratives allow youth "to tell their life stories. Opportunities need to be provided for them to convey what they are saying, or not saying, about leisure in general and leisure as a context for identity formation" (Kivel, 1997, p. 34). Identity construction is key here, and the intersection between constructs of identity and popular culture is a site of multiple tensions that occur as young people resist, embrace, and negotiate issues of race, class, age, ability, sex, and gender. Due to (or, perhaps, in spite of) the confinements of this essay, I've chosen to showcase three soundscapes that illustrate critical connections between the politics of identity and the ways that youth use popular culture.

Second, by adopting a cultural studies approach, this paper seeks to understand the poetics and the politics of soundscapes; that is, what the soundscapes "say" (poetics) about young people's experiences as representational texts and, more importantly, how soundscapes are made as lived practices within particular power relationships (politics). In this approach, attention is focused upon the act of making and using music in everyday practices. Too often research has ignored the lived experiences of youth, focusing on what popular culture does to young people rather than what young people make and do with it (Bennett, 2001; Chu, 1997; Dimitriadis, 2001a; Sweetman; 2001). Making music provides youth with new ways to express their values and share their anger, joy, hope, and sorrow. The songs and compositions that young people create focus attention on the

ways they negotiate various kinds of social injustices—such as racism, poverty, and discrimination—that they encounter in their daily lives. Through music, *The Beat of Boyle Street* opens up a politicized space for representation and recognizes the value and importance of difference.

Listening to soundscapes arguably helps researchers and practitioners enter into the shared space of the "dance" of life with young people. Sharing creative and communicative processes is important, as the only way to "understand and know the subtlety of racism [and other forms of oppression] is to interact and listen carefully to people of color who are sensitive to the nuances" (Fox, 1995, p. 180). *The Beat of Boyle Street* engages in the world—often quite literally the street—where young people rap, sing, and speak about popular culture and leisure in their everyday lives. bell hooks (1994) noted that "cultural studies that looks at popular culture has the power to move intellectuals out of the academy and into the streets where our work can be shared with a larger audience" (p. 4). Listening to young people's voices and sharing the spaces of their music allows us to connect across boundaries and honor our differences.

Doing popular culture, doing leisure

The soundscapes created by the students in *The Beat of Boyle Street* provide insights into the notoriously messy relationships between the everyday experiences of young people and popular culture. Fiske (1989) describes popular culture as:

> deeply contradictory in societies where power is unequally distributed along axes of class, gender, race, and the other categories that we use to make sense of our social differences. Popular culture is the culture of the

> subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience. Equally, it shows signs of resisting or evading these forces: Popular culture contradicts itself. (Fiske, 1989, p. 4-5)

Popular culture contains a plurality of meanings that enable actors "to partake of both of its forces simultaneously and devolves to them the power to situate themselves within this play of forces at the point that meets their particular cultural interests" (Fiske, 1989, p. 5). Hence, rather than holding a single, fixed meaning, popular culture serves as a bank of resources from which young people may actively choose, appropriating from cultural raw materials to use in specific ways in their day-to-day lives (Sweetman, 2001). Youth appropriate and use popular culture in ways that often embrace and challenge prevailing power relations. One primary site of appropriation is the consumption of music.

Frith (1983) noted that there was no such thing as the passive consumption of music. According to Frith, Willis (1990) and de Certeau (1984) consumption is a symbolically creative, artistic activity. For de Certeau (1984), the everyday practices of life involve people's use of cultural "stuff" (music, food, city spaces, etc.) that shifts meaning in new, creative, and meaningful ways. He refers to these creative uses as tactics. Tactics are ways of consuming/using/doing things in ways that resist or confound the strategies intended in their production purposes. de Certeau (1984) conceives of tactics as small everyday practices (e.g., talking, walking, shopping, cooking) that belong to the other/the weak that allow for victories over the more powerful: "these procedures

and ruses of consumers compose a network of anti-discipline" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xv). Tactics operate as important processes that allow people to make and remake popular cultural artifacts such as films, music, clothes, and recreation into meaningful aspects of their everyday lives.

Rojek (2000) refers to the tactics that consumers use as "the capacity to play with the codes of consumption and subvert them" (p. 47). Willis (1990), too, described tactical practices of young people, subverting the music industry by taping music from the radio for free. In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, computers and technology are tactical areas in young people's practices of producing and consuming music, as they download, remix, sample from music files, and create their own CDs. Tactical practices are thus a central point for research, as "the study of popular culture requires the study not only of the cultural commodities out of which it is made, but also of the ways that people use them. The latter are far more creative and varied than the former" (Fiske, 1989, p. 15). Soundscapes illustrate ways that young people are both creating and using popular culture.

The importance of what young people do with "the popular" emerges from critiques of semiotic approaches to studying popular culture. Semiotic analyses (particularly of music) have been criticized for placing too much emphasis on texts and thus moving young people themselves and their "messy and unpredictable relationship to and with popular texts" (Dimitriadis, 2001a, p. 30) into the background. Textual analyses often view young people as passive receptors of popular culture, easily corrupted and controlled within strategies of production, and thus in need of defensive protection from its negative effects (i.e., listening to gangsta rap will turn young people into gangsters).

Ballinger (1995) writes that textual approaches to studying music are "particularly problematic with forms of music that are heavily coded (possibly to avoid censure), or where lyrics are of secondary importance or even misleading[2]" (p.17).

As a counterargument, Ballinger (1995), Bennett (2002, 2001), Chu (1997), Dimitriadis (2001a), Fiske (1989), Sweetman (2001), and Willis (2000, 1990) support work that is "celebratory, validating the kind of creativity and effort that young people invest in the non-elite arts" (Dimitriadis, 2001a, p. 30). In her work with youth and fanzines, Chu (1997) notes that much of this work "emphasizes a framework for involving youth in extant projects and social movements. My research ultimately attempts to go a step beyond involving youth by asking how we can involve ourselves in the projects young people are initiating on their own" (p. 82). *The Beat of Boyle Street* starts from the investment that young people have already made in popular music, dance, and dress. As recreation, the project allows youth the space to create music in an atmosphere that values and supports the gifts and talents that they bring to the project.

In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, I work with two groups of five students for each of the four terms that comprise a school year (ten weeks per term). Each group of students meets during four eighty-minute periods a week. The school provides a "music room" equipped with six computers for our use, which are loaded with audio software ranging from editors, sequencers, synthesizers, and multi-track recorders. Soundscapes are one of many experiential activities the students and I do together in our exploration of leisure, audio production, music, and culture. Along with soundscapes, other compositions created by participants have included remixes, spoken-word poetry, rap/hip-hop songs,

techno/dance music, live recordings of Aboriginal drumming groups, and film/video soundtracks.

Pop cultural chorasters

"Doing soundscapes" and walking through urban spaces to collect sounds evokes notions of the flâneur. In the late 19th century, the flâneur was "a new kind of public person with the leisure to wander, watch and browse" as an objective observer, looking at the urban spectacle. He was a gentleman with some wealth, and not part of the "productive process" (Wearing and Wearing, 1996, p. 232). The flâneur's "passion and profession is to *wed the crowd*" (White, 2000, p. 36) and he places himself amid the masses:

> to take up residence in the multiplicity, in whatever is seething, moving, evanescent and infinite: you're not at home, but you feel at home everywhere; you see everyone, you're at the centre of everything yet you remain hidden from everybody. (Baudelaire, 1986, p. 9, quoted in White, 2000, p. 36)

Therefore, the flâneur is not considered part of the crowd, though he may be in it. In terms of class and status, he is clearly apart and removed from what he is observing. The flâneur stands *above* the crowd, and in a position of privilege, but ironically one that assumes some sort of neutrality and invisibility. As a result, the concept of the flâneur becomes representative of an objective, privileged, masculinist way of seeing and knowing the world. It represents an objectification and social stratification of city spaces, a reading of urban people and spaces as texts without necessarily locating those texts (or

oneself) within formations of power. Nonetheless, the figure of the flâneur has continued to be a privileged metaphor in the appreciation of the visual dimensions of city life.

In contrast, critique, and an as alternative to the flâneur, Wearing and Wearing (1996) offer the notion of the "choraster." Citing Grosz (1995), they argue that the "chora," Plato's space between being and becoming, suggests:

> a space to be occupied and given meaning by the people who make use of the space. The space gives birth to the lived experiences of human beings, it is open to many possibilities. (Wearing and Wearing, 1996, p.233)

The chora presents an important distinction between the more objective concept of place from the subjectivity of space. Place has a distinct location which it defines; place is fixed and implies stability. Space in contrast is composed of intersections of mobile elements and shifting, vague borders (Soja, 1996). "Space is practised place," says de Certeau (1984), "the street defined by urban planning [strategic production] is the place which becomes transformed into space by the people who use it [tactical consumption]" (1984, p. 117). Thus the "chora" becomes the space in which place is made possible. It acts as:

> a space whose meaning can be constantly redefined by its participants. 'Chorasters' would be [people] who bring meaning to the "chora" from their own position in their own culture and creatively incorporate into their sense of self the experiences of interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds in the chora's space. (Wearing and Wearing, 1996, p.235)

Wearing and Wearing's (1996) feminist critique of the flâneur opens up the creative, interactive possibility of the choraster and invites inquiry and exploration of the

social production of space. The notion of the choraster is demonstrated in the soundscape created by another BSEC student, a "choraster" whom I'll call "Christine."

Soundscape 2: *Christine was conducting a field experiment about who would say hello in response to her: a 17-year-old Aboriginal woman, very precise in her appearance, her make-up, hair, and a tightly fitting pale blue sportswear outfit, which she later described to me as "hip-hop clothes." We began collecting sounds walking to the City Centre mall, where we hung out, listening to the drone of chatter in the food court while having a coffee and talking about how we look at and perceive other people. She took me through echoing underground pedway tunnels—again we screamed to test the echo—to the Citadel Theatre's atrium, a lush, humid space full of plants and waterfalls. She told me that the space brought back "childhood memories" from when her mother would bring her to see the exotic plants. She and I strolled along the gravel paths, recording its crunch underfoot, and she spoke about how dry, brown, and neglected many of the plants looked. As a child, she said, "you don't notice the flaws" in either the plants, or in parents. The Citadel was a space that she associated with her mom, and we pushed through the doors back onto the street having a discussion about her mom and teen pregnancy (her mom was a young teen when Christine was born). Almost immediately, we passed a white businessman dressed in a suit and Christine said "hello," once more with no response. At this she said: "They probably just think 'another Native' from the way I'm dressed."* **[CD Track 25]**

Christine's soundscape poem:

We just record everything that's going by? Well let's walk!

A lot of casual people say 'hello' and not a lot of other people will,

They'll just turn their heads.

You don't notice the flaws…

It's so noisy everywhere…

People look stressed, busy and tired…

We just record everything that's going by? Well let's walk!

People look stressed, busy, and tired…

They're in their own thoughts…

Walking up the stairs…

Childhood memories…

Different nationalities…

But no one's saying "hello" back…

Childhood memories…

They probably just think:

'Another Native' from the way I'm dressed.

Christine's written text poetically expresses many of the ways that she understands the spaces of the city and her positions within it. Her soundscape poem operates as "a type a telling, a performance event, the process of making or telling a story" (Lincoln and Denzin, 2003, p. 240). Lincoln and Denzin (2003) also point out that "the self itself is a narrative production" and that "we can study experience only through its representations, through the ways in which stories are told" (p. 240).

Christine's line "different nationalities" begins to tell how she senses and reads identity—she has conflated nationality with race, which may echo many Aboriginal-Canadian people's preference for the cultural descriptor "First Nations." She also

expresses how identity is represented through popular culture, in this example, her clothing style. Walking back to school, I asked her to describe what she was wearing, and why others might perceive her as "another Native" because of how she was dressed. She simply described her clothes as "hip-hop." In this phrase her clothes represent something creative and hybrid—Aboriginal hip-hop culture. As a representational practice, she makes her style mean something, and this meaning-making process opens a space for her to express herself through pop culture.

Although hip-hop originated as an expression of urban African-American experience (Lipsitz, 1994), its style has been appropriated and infused with different meanings in different localities (Ballinger, 1995; Bennett, 2001; Dimitriadis, 2001a), and it is often employed as resistance to racial oppression. The power of hip-hop to cross cultures and express the inner city experiences of Aboriginal-Canadian youth is further explained by hooks (1990):

> Many groups now share with black folks a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding even if it is not informed by shared circumstance. Radical postmodernism calls attention to those shared sensibilities which cross the boundaries of class, race, gender, etc., that could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy—ties that promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition. (p. 27)

This passage also helps to express the simultaneous production of difference and similarity in Christine's use of hip-hop culture, music, and clothes. In one sense her hip-hop style represents the status quo: she clearly fits in well with her friends, her siblings in

the school, and other young people in Edmonton. At the same time, her tactical use of clothes as some form of resistance to dominant discourses reproduces other stereotypes—hip-hop as gang related, thuggish, criminal, highly sexualized, or otherwise bad. There is a "doubled" meaning to her narrative self-representation that proclaims, "I'm just like you" to some, while stating, "I'm not at all like you" to others (Jones, 2003, p. 114).

These meanings leak out of her phrase "they probably just think 'another Native'" which tells something about her understanding of the negative perceptions and attitudes toward Native people in Edmonton, yet also contains an underlying tone of defiance. Davis (1998) wrote that although many black women sang the blues with sexist lyrics, the tones in which they sang those words were often laced with a subtle, though powerful, type of irony, defiance, and resistance. For Christine, the consequences of using a particular style to articulate difference seems to be desirable and undesirable, just as the effects of employing style to fit in are both wanted and unwanted. These tensions saturate young people's use of popular culture and music, and center on the articulation of difference in specific contexts, a politics of location.

Giroux (1994) points out that difference acts as "a dangerous marker of those historical, political, social, and cultural borderlands where people who are considered the 'Other' are often policed, excluded, and oppressed" (p. 12). For pop cultural theorists such as Giroux, difference is the site of struggle in the hegemonic processes that resist and reproduce dominant ideological codes such as racism, sexism, and colonialism. Rojek (2000) adds that:

> weaving identities around real and imagined forms of difference... emphasizes that leisure choices are made for the purposes of identity

> distinction... [and] lays down a marker which distinguishes the individual from the mass. Joining a taste culture should be interpreted as a conscious attempt to transform one's given relationship with the rest of society. (p. 99)

Representations operate through both the way that Christine thinks of herself and the way that others read her. The gaze that she feels walking through the city affects her sense of self and regulates her identity; that is, whether she perceives herself as "hip-hop" and cool, or as "just another Native" and out-of-place. Meaning is constructed within these tensions, her similarity to, and difference from, other objects as a strategy for positioning or making sense of herself (du Gay, et al., 1997). Yet, there is also a profound dissonance in this, a disjuncture in the contradiction between feeling good about one's style or feeling like "just another Native" that seems difficult to reconcile.

Christine's soundscape, as a text, does not directly say much about constructions of gender and sexuality. The few words in her soundscape poem that intimate something about this are "the way I'm dressed," though this is framed in a comment that forefronts issues of race. This phrase indicates that the one dimension of race is crossed by other dimensions of identity—gender, sexuality, class, and age (Hall, 1997). Her composition carries only traces of gendered experience, but it is framed within the negotiation of "what it means" to be a young Aboriginal woman, particularly within the poorer, urban, fringe neighborhoods of Edmonton. "What it means," according to Hall (1997), is always up for grabs (though not a free-for-all) and marked out in the ways that people do things. It is in Christine's "doing" of the soundscape, walking through downtown, recording

sounds, interacting with other people, and wearing hip-hop clothes that create meaning for herself, like a choraster.

In a study of the construction of identity among lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, Kivel (1997) wrote that participants "engaged in a variety of activities (e.g., drama, music, reading) which could be described as existing on a continuum of doing and being. These activities led them to contemplate, confirm and/or cope with different aspects of identity, including sexual identity" (p. 36). The "different aspects of identity" often create tensions that exist across differences in social milieu—that is, across real and symbolic borderlands—as youth navigate family environments, friendship and peer groups, educational settings, and urban/public (e.g., shopping malls) contexts. Kivel (1997) notes that for one young woman in her study, "leisure was a context in which the process of 'doing,' and more specifically, the process of 'doing and being involved in theater' allowed her to negotiate and manage her different personae" (1997, p. 37). Christine's "doing" of the soundscape as well as her ways of "doing" her appearance allows her to negotiate issues of difference.

Borderlands and border crossings

The soundscapes presented in this paper highlight the contestation of cultural "use of things" such as city spaces and music in what Berland (1992) notes are "complex effects of emancipation and domination in the (re)formation of marginal politics and cultural identities" (p. 46). The young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street* embody their identities in a variety of complex, hybridized ways: through their style of dress, hair style, in their tattoos, with the way they speak, the ways that they dance, and their attitudes

about being Aboriginal-Canadian. "Who they are" is a polyfugue of cultural forces, collaged from how they have been positioned within society (as "Indians"; as poor, undereducated; as criminals, or as victims; as the "other" of the white, middle-class, professional male), as well as from their experiences as agents for change, resisting the assignment of subject positions by means of transgressing borders (Anzaldúa, 1994; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1990).

There is a certain danger and power in crossing borders and being "out of place," a politics of space that cuts across material and symbolic boundaries. Hall (1997) writes that:

> what unsettles culture is 'matter out of place'—the breaking of our unwritten rules and codes. Dirt in the garden is fine, but dirt in one's bedroom is 'matter out of place'—a sign of pollution, of symbolic boundaries transgressed, of taboos broken. What we do with 'matter out of place' is to sweep it up, throw it out, restore it to order, bring back the normal state of affairs. The retreat of many cultures towards 'closure' against foreigners, intruders, aliens, and 'others' is part of the same process of purification. (p. 236)

MC Ed Mile's soundscape, titled "I'm a scrub with a bus pass," is indicative of how he experiences, transgresses, and is limited by borders. His references to being poor (a "scrub") and relying on public transportation indicate part of his experience of class relationships. We discussed what it felt like when he wrote "businessmen look at us funny," and he knows that students—especially Aboriginal youth—are viewed as out of place in the city centre during the day, often stereotyped as beggars, thieves, thugs, or

troublemakers. White people, he says, always look at him funny because he is Native. His soundscape, rapping as we walked through downtown and riding the subway trains across the city, becomes a complex performance narrative about crossing boundaries of race, age, class, location, and other identity politics.

Anzaldúa (1994) discusses breaking rules and crossing cultural "Borderlands" as a spatial metaphor for bridging gaps and understanding the politics of location. For Anzaldúa,

> The Borderlands are physically present wherever two cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy… It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. (1987, unpaged preface).

The borderlands offer a concept that opens space for de-centred subjects—"chorasters" (Wearing and Wearing, 1996)—capable of creating meaning across boundaries. These borders, real-and-imagined, divide and separate, yet also link and connect. We are articulating the borderlands in the soundscapes that we create as we move through the city, as we share experiences and discuss "what it means" to be who we are, where we are. Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) discuss the hopefulness and potential of moving into a hybrid "thirdspace" (see also Soja, 1996) represented by the borderlands:

> Hybrids, Creoles, mestizos—these are names for a new form of postmodern subject who no longer is caught in what Donna Haraway (1991) calls the "spiral dance," a subject who no longer needs an Other to

> define itself, a subject that is continuously engaged in 'stitching' itself together and 'assembling' itself out of various identity parts available in popular culture and everyday life, none of which fit together too neatly or hold together too long. (p. 21)

These words vibrantly echo metaphoric qualities of producing computer-generated music—sampling and remixing—as well as the way that young people construct and are constructed by the culture around them.

A third soundscape further highlights the possibilities of the power of transgressing borders. This composition, as in the others already discussed, also reveals discontinuities in young people's use of popular culture. Like Christine's soundscape, "Bryan's" composition contains examples of a number of hegemonic strategies at work—dominant forms of masculinity, educational meritocracy, high versus low culture, ageism, and racism. Bryan's soundscape also reveals something of the historical factors that have framed his experience of being "Indian," as well as indicating contradictions in his attempts to wrest power by embracing "gangsta thug" representations of himself.

Soundscape 3*: Today "Bryan" and I spent a lot of time just talking, asking questions about "what is music?" He asked: "Are our soundscapes music?" We talked about what "styles" have been popular throughout different eras. He said that Native drumming is both an historical and contemporary form of music, but otherwise, "old" music to him is stuff like Easy-E ("classic rap"), Credence Clearwater Revival ("classic rock"), or else its all Beethoven ("classical shit"). For him, its hip-hop/rap and not much else counts. I worked with him to type out his reflections on our "soundwalk" through downtown. He nonchalantly commented that this process was like "making a police*

statement." He included phrases about how he feels the gaze of others—"homos" he called them—on the bus, labeling him a "bad Indian" with their stares. "Fuck them!" he said, though he would not include this phrase in his composition. He also spoke to me about his "drunk grandfather" who was just released from hospital (not deemed "crazy" enough for admittance), about his father getting out of jail in December, and just learning that his brother is in jail, and will be there for six more months. He concluded that education was important, but he didn't seem to be sure of what it offered other than being "not jail."

He also spoke about how he spent his weekend getting drunk and stoned with his friends, although he didn't want to include these lines in his poem either. He said that he thought an education would keep him from being "an alcoholic." We talked about what it meant to be "Indian" (his word), and he seemed amazed when I told him I felt a type of gaze when I come into the community co-op, and pass through the crowds of Aboriginal people standing outside in the morning, how I felt very white. His response to that was something like: "Awww, but you're a teacher, you come here to help us!"

There are such contradictions in his actions (drinking alcohol but not wanting to be an alcoholic, stealing cars but wanting to stay out of jail) but he's a deep thinker, he asks tough questions: "why do I have to come to school? What's the point?"

I wonder: What will an education give him if people continue to view him as a "bad Indian" with "THUG" tattooed across his knuckles whether he is educated or not?

Bryan's spoken-word poem [CD Track 26]

Woke in the morning, about 8 o'clock,

Had a cigarette, then caught the bus

It was cold and raining

Two stupid little guys were looking at me and seemed like they wanted to start some shit because I'm a _____, and they got on my nerves…

I had to keep my mouth shut cause I was on the bus and didn't want to get booted off…

They probably thought I was some sort of bad Indian

Or some shit…

Kicking it at my cousins, over the weekend

Got messed up…

Had a birthday party for my grandpa and all the people in my family who had birthdays in August… its kinda late but he just got out of the hospital, he fell and cracked his head when he was drunk, but now he's alright…

I talked to my dad; he gets out of jail in December…

I found out my other brother is in jail until January, for stealing…

Coming to this school here is cool, it's alright…

There's a lot of Indians here getting an education…

I don't want to be an alcoholic, fall down, or go to jail again,

When those cops put me in jail for nothing and they broke my hand, hit my brother, I hate _____ cops…

I want to get my grade 12 and get school over with, then get on with my life…

A politics of representation?

Bryan's soundscape highlights issues around ideological issues of race, masculinity, alcohol and drugs, and education. It points to ways that history inscribes

subject positions, traced from grandfather, to father, to older brother, to Bryan. Also present are indications of the ways that racist ideology works when conflict arises: in any disturbance on the bus, Bryan, as an "Indian," believes he would be viewed as the "bad" guy, and "get booted off." Bryan purposely presents himself as a type of tough "gangsta" thug and desires some of the consequences of this, though like for Christine, the doubled meanings that result contain contradictions, some desirable, some undesirable. This point begins to illustrate the politically complex effects of representation in broader social worlds.

In another example, following a New Year's day incident in which a group of "up to thirty" Aboriginal young people[3] were alleged to have attacked five white teens on a subway train, the *Edmonton Journal* (January 6th, 2003, p. A1, p. B1 and B12) ran a series of reports on youth violence in the city. Several previous instances of "Native gangs" involved in attacks on white people were referenced. Not one instance of any other group—white, black, Asian, Latino—was offered. The message seemingly conveyed is that only Native young people are involved in gangs. The *Edmonton Journal* characterizations also involved several non-sequiturs that reproduce other negative stereotypes: "Police say the New Year's Day attack on the five white teenagers appears to be racially motivated. One of the victims had her purse stolen" (p. B12). The implication here is that Native young people are not only violent, but they are *also thieves*. In these representations, all Native young people are criminalized. Conversely, if not criminalized, other media (e.g., a March 10-14, 2003 CBC radio feature on youth participating in *The Beat of Boyle Street*) tend to portray Aboriginal young people as helpless victims, positioned as objects of pity. Both of these media discourses, deviance

and pity, act as regulatory processes that affect the ways that Native youth are viewed, and how Native youth view themselves.

The soundscape recordings created by the students in *The Beat of Boyle Street* may help to disrupt these discourses, as young people critically think and speak about their own experiences walking, living, and interacting in the city. On this note I wonder how *The Beat of Boyle Street* operates—in addition to being a recreational activity for students as well as a re-engagement strategy for the education centre—as an effective intervention in the field of representation to contest the negative portrayals of Native youth in more complex and constructive ways, through music, voice, and sound.

Cultural critic bell hooks wrote of the importance of people's voices, claiming that "It is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject" (1989, p. 9). In an interview with Sakolsky (1995), Native rapper Bobby Bee echoed the importance of speech:

> My music is a form of change because it brings up the issues in the first place. I always thought that half the problem in anything is not even knowing there is a problem… If you realize the power of the medium of music, I think you can bring about positive changes as opposed to negative. (p. 164)

Bee's strategy attempts to replace negative representations with more positive ones—songs, poems, and soundscapes—in celebration of difference, in order to change power dynamics by constructing "a positive identification with what has been abjected" (Hall, 1997, p. 273). Accordingly, for the young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, hip-hop

may become a powerful expression of being Native, a hopeful celebration of culture, youth, and survival.

However, for Hall (1997), larger cultural questions about the effectiveness of any politics of representation remain. He notes:

> The problem with the positive/negative strategy is that adding positive images to the largely negative repertoire of the dominant regime of representation increases the diversity of the ways in which "being black" [or Native/Aboriginal] is represented, but does not *necessarily* displace the negative. Since the binaries remain in place, meaning continues to be framed by them. The strategy challenges the binaries—but it does not undermine them. (p. 274)

This thinking produces a sense of winning a battle, but losing the larger struggle. Will Aboriginal youth, such as Bryan, always be seen as a "bad Indian" whether they are educated or not, wear hip-hop clothes or not, or appropriate and employ popular culture in the most innovative (or cliché) ways? Will young Aboriginal people continue to believe that they are either a "bad Indian," a "scrub with a bus pass," or "just another Native" within a larger cultural framework that could see them create an evocative soundscape poem one day, and be labeled a gang member in the media the next?

In terms of cultural change, representational politics involve struggles in which meaning is always contested, partial, and unfinished (Hall, 1997). As de Certeau (1984) points out, the ability of dominant cultural strategies to fully legitimate themselves is never totally ensured. As we create soundscapes, poems, raps, and music, young people and I engage in discussions of race, class, and gender, and we talk to each other about

ways that begin to expose and unravel ways that some ideologies work in our everyday lives. We talk about how things could be different for us, and we ask questions about the options that seem available to us from which to choose. hooks (1994) stressed that "talking critically about popular culture [is] a powerful way to share knowledge, in and outside the academy, across differences, in an oppositional way" (p. 4). These small victories inform larger hegemonic processes of social change, cultural hybridity, and border crossings, while young people make and remake popular culture into meaningful aspects of their everyday lives.

Coda: The performance of possibilities

Soundscapes operate as interpretive windows into the representational politics and poetics of urban Aboriginal youth through voice and sound (Krims, 2000). Soundscapes are stories partially told; yet they must additionally be heard. These narrative compositions are part of dialogical processes of speaking and listening, being and becoming—that is, as we make soundscapes, they in turn also partially construct who we are. Laurel Richardson (1997) recollects that it wasn't until she had written a book that she was considered or addressed as a "writer." In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, young people and I engage in making and discussing sonic compositions as part of a movement from "bad Indian" or "another Native" to something else instead: Aboriginal storytellers, chorasters, and *producers*.

Additionally, I recognize that I am "working the hyphens" in constructing self-other relationships in *The Beat of Boyle Street* (Dimitriadis, 2001b; Fine, 1998), and I too have become a choraster. The choraster operates at the hyphens, to "creatively

incorporate into their sense of self the experiences of interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds" (Wearing & Wearing, 1996, p. 235). I recognized this when, walking through downtown, MC Ed Mile referred to me as "my fluorescent Native, Brett the advocate." The soundscapes that I hear now when I move through the city have changed, as I continue to hear the chorus of MC Ed Mile, Christine, and Bryan's voices. Soundscapes have changed my understanding of Aboriginal youth in Edmonton. In other words, there has been a movement, as Richardson (1997) notes through which "new narratives offer new patterns for lives" (p. 33). Madison (2003) also writes about this movement as:

> the point where the *performance of possibilities* aims to create or contribute to a discursive space where unjust systems and processes are identified and interrogated. It is where what has been expressed through the illumination of voice and the encounter with subjectivity motivates individuals to some level of informed and strategic action. (p. 476)

The soundscapes that Aboriginal youth create are symbolic and embodied movements through urban space, the *performance of possibilities* that weaves poetic voices with the political elements of sound.

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[1] In addition to the subway stations, MC Ed Mile's rap also refers to a variety of Edmonton locations (Whyte Avenue), personalities (Oilers hockey player Georges Laraque), and youth centres (I Human). "Nechi" is a Cree word meaning friend/brother.

[2] Ballinger (1995) uses nonsensical lyrics from George Clinton's funk classic "Atomic Dog" to illustrate this point: "bow wow wow yippee yo yippee yay"!

[3] Some of these youth are participants in *The Beat of Boyle Street*.

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Rec needs a new rhythm, cuz rap is where we're livin'

Brett D. Lashua and Karen Fox

Rec needs a new rhythm, cuz rap is where we're livin'

"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song"

– Maya Angelou

In this paper we discuss the importance of *listening* to the lyrical stories of rap songs that young people create, and *listening* as vulnerability to the radical alterity of the other (Burggraeve, 2002; Dudiak, 2001). We reflect on how we have been engaged, changed, and challenged to rethink our understandings of leisure and ourselves as leisure scholar-practitioners as a result of listening to rap especially composed by Aboriginal young people. Rapping and writing rap lyrics are powerful forms of storytelling; raps are stories told through music and performance (Dimitriadis, 2001c; Rose, 1994). Similarly, the layers and textures of a song (e.g., frenetic beats or soaring melodies) are capable of conveying evocative stories or narratives. Each musical note, beat, and voice is meaningful in part because of its own tone and texture, and carries meaning also because of its *relation* to other *different* rhythms and voices. In the same way, we, as human beings, learn about ourselves through our relations to what is different to us. Learning requires responsiveness and vulnerability to "strangeness" and willingness to acquire new habits, or at the very least to question the habits we have (Orlie, 1994). Along these lines, Grossberg (1994) noted: "the central issue, then, is not one of merely acknowledging difference; rather, the more difficult question concerns the kind of difference that is acknowledged and engaged" (p. 13). This paper presents our personal autoethnographic accounts as a type of storied composition relating how we have engaged with rap music in the everyday lives of urban Aboriginal youth, the ways that we have listened to the

different voices of young people involved in our research, and how we have reflected on the presence of our own voices and listening practices in our engagements.

Additional resonance and dissonance emerge as these engagements challenge our ways of doing and writing research. That is, the ways that we are able to do research shapes the kind of researchers we are capable of being and becoming (Richardson, 1997). Are stories important to leisure research? Are rap music and popular culture valuable areas of leisure for young people? If so, how are we engaged by these stories, songs, and young people? Our accounts offer a limited representation of our research at Boyle Street Education Centre (BSEC)[1], an inner city charter school in Edmonton, Alberta that seeks to re-engage "at risk" and out-of-school youth in educational processes, and a recreational music project called *The Beat of Boyle Street*. The stories of our involvement in this project share our experiences as qualitative researchers doing narrative ethnographic research at the limit of our selves, learning about leisure with Aboriginal youth making rap music.

Urban Aboriginal rap music

For many Aboriginal young people, particularly those living in poverty in the inner city, rap music has become an important site for the articulation of political and social struggles around Aboriginal-Canadian culture and identity (Efron, 2001; Hollands, 2004). Some forms of rap music provide, among many things, expressive means of survival, camaraderie, community and joy (Dimitriadis, 2001a). Rap music, like poetry, speaks more than it means (Norris, 1996). Furthermore, rap music occupies a paradoxical cultural space through which some kinds of knowledge and identities are enabled while

others are limited or denied. This space is characterized by struggles over questions of who can say what, in which circumstances and with what power (Kelly, 2004). Rose (1994) argued that rap music is one way that young people are contesting and deploying power through narrative:

> Rap is a contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless. On this stage, rappers act out inversions of status hierarchies, tell alternative stories of contact with police and the education process, and draw portraits of contact with dominant groups in which the hidden transcript inverts/subverts the public, dominant transcript. (p. 101)

Although it is a problematic cultural practice, rap music draws attention to the complexities of urban life for marginalized people (Mahiri & Conner, 2003). In doing so, rap offers possibilities for counter-hegemonic perspectives, particularly through the views and voices of urban youth. Lipsitz (1994) argued:

> our discussions of youth culture will be incomplete if we fail to locate them within the racialized crisis of our time, but our understanding of that crisis will be incomplete if we fail to learn the lessons that young people are trying to teach through their dance, dress, speech, and visual imagery. (p. 19)

And, of course, what they have to teach us through rap music and engagements with wider hip-hop culture[2]. However, as Lipsitz (1994) reminds us, our understandings of rap music in the everyday lives of young people must be situated within social, racial, economic, and political relations and contexts. As scholar-practitioners, we are deeply imbricated in these relations and must ethically attend to the effects and consequences of

our engagements with youth hip-hop cultures. We must critically reflect and position ourselves in relation to constructions of self-other relationships. That is, how and where do two white, educated, middle-class, adults in positions of leadership and "authority" begin to interact within the worlds of urban Aboriginal hip-hop?

The "contact zone"

Pratt (1991) uses the phrase "contact zone" to describe the spaces where people of different cultures grapple, collide or struggle over meaning and power. For us, simply approaching the site of the research represents moments for us to reflect on issues of difference.

> [Karen] As I walk up the sidewalk to Boyle Street Community Co-Operative, I pass men, women, young people smoking and hanging out. Mostly they look at each other, catching glimpses as I walk by. No eye contact, no holding doors open for each other, no words. Within a block of city hall, shopping areas, and business offices, I have entered another world where different rules apply and I am the outsider. I want to show them respect but am acutely aware that my elite, educated social practices shout power and privilege. They call me to respond, but, I must learn a new rhythm and greeting. When I leave, I watch an Aboriginal man slowly and carefully walk across the street, making a police car with lights and sirens wailing stop and wait for him to move past the vehicle. Resistance is alive and well.

[Brett] I too feel a sense of encountering a world of difference when I enter the community Co-Op and work with the young people there. On my first day of the project I noted when, after lunch, students set up a CD player in the pool table/recreation area and did traditional Aboriginal dancing to some powwow music while they were playing pool, then switched over to rap music and started breakdancing. Most students were wearing extra-baggy hip-hop clothes and have homemade tattoos all over their hands and arms, one of which proclaims "THUG" on one arm, with a spirit circle tattooed on the other. How do these cultures—Aboriginal and urban hip-hop—mix, and *how do I mix in*? I sat there watching the dancing today and felt like I was on another planet, which is a telling sensation I suppose...

As we began to build relationships with students through music, we began to see processes of "mixing in"—or "remixing"—as a vital way to engage with, listen to, and learn what young people in the project had to say through their musical stories. These young people's musical practices are part and parcel of a larger engagement of Indigenous people in processes of representing themselves:

> The representing project spans both the notion of representation as political concept and representation as a form of voice and expression... Representation of indigenous peoples by indigenous people is about countering the dominant society's images about indigenous peoples, their lifestyles, and belief systems. (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 150-151)

Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) add that in order for people to free themselves of a colonial mindset, they must engage in "telling their own stories, in regaining control over

their own representation in popular culture" (p. 18). Musical texts such as rap songs offer counter-narratives that affirm, reconstruct and re-present urban Aboriginal youth identities. This means that rap music (and popular culture) must become a valued arena of youth leisure—from perspectives of research and practice—in order to support young people in leisure pursuits that provide means of self-narrativization and self-representation.

We turn to listening practices as ethical practices to critically interrogate what we are hearing and *not hearing* in our research practice. Levinas suggests that ethics is suffused within the encounter of the Other, and if we are to wrestle with the inherent violence of these encounters, we must embrace a responsibility to be vulnerable to the Other as radical alterity (Burggraeve, 2002; Dudiak, 2001). Since conventional concepts of dialogue imply a "sameness," that is, attempts by the listener to find commonality or to require the other to fit into pre-existing categories, dialogue potentially becomes an instance of violence or harm. To listen to the alterity requires attention to the responsibility the listener has for the Other. Listening, therefore is an important aspect of this research, as we must be:

> responsible for the ways we as unique individuals inhabit one another's worlds, as well as how we write up our empirical material (or 'data'), opening a space to see ethnography writ large, as a political praxis that individuals engage in particular ways and with real effects. (Dimitriadis, 2001b, p. 579)

Thus, we are interested not in the ways that we have intervened in the lives of young people, but rather how they have entered into our lives: What are we missing and *dis*missing when we listen to rap music made by young people?

Call and response

Our narratives operate as a type of metaphoric "pas de deux"—the reciprocal, negotiated "dance" between our stories and participants' stories (Janesick, 2000). For Janesick (2000, 1998), metaphor is a powerful expressive device, layering and connecting multiple meanings and providing new ways to rethink complex research concepts. We contend that we need new metaphors such as those provided by rap music to reconsider the multiple roles and locations we inhabit as researchers. *The Beat of Boyle Street* combines making rap music, computer technology, and recreation in a school setting. This means that as we (Brett and Karen) sit down with young people to begin creating music we are simultaneously leisure practitioners, teachers, audio producers, and leisure researchers. On a more basic level (but of no less importance), the shared experience of music requires both a player and an audience, and the performance becomes a *co-production* between performers and *active* listeners.

In traditions of rap music, a similar dialectic of "call and response" (Dimitriadis, 2001c, p. 26) exists between the rap performer (the MC) and the audience—e.g., "Everybody throw your hands in the air and wave them like you just don't care!"—through which the line between performer and audience blurs to include those both on and off stage. This kind of artist-audience connection is striking for the ways that both the official speaker in a position of power and authority (the MC) and a group with a

different kind of power (the audience) "speak," listen, and momentarily connect to one another. The call and response dialectic is metaphorically characteristic of our research in *The Beat of Boyle Street*. These processes may be understood as operating in several ways, as we ask questions of young people and they respond to us, as they make rap music and we respond to these compositions, and additionally in the various ways that we do not connect, dismiss the call and fail to answer/respond. In one example from our research, a young man (age 20) who raps under the name "MC Ed Mile"[3] was recording sounds in the downtown subway stations for a song about racism, poverty and mass transit. He approached a person he described as a "business woman" to ask her a question. Later he told us:

> At times it's like, it's like, 'cause they see a Native guy they think I'm gonna ask them for money. Like, I had this stereotype just a couple days ago. I was walking down the street, and went up to ask this lady a question. I was like, "um, I was wondering if you could help me out?" and she was like "no no, I got nothing!" and I'm like "hold on man, you never even listened to the question yet! I just wanted to interview you about what you thought about Churchill Station!"

MC Ed Mile reminds us that we often believe we know the answer to the question long before we hear it, and that we are often wrong. The important role we have to play as scholar-practitioners responds to young people first and foremost by listening, participating in the co-production of the call and response performance of research. As qualitative researchers, the response or "answer" that begins with listening to the calls,

stories, or songs of young people continues as we ethically open to the alterity of the young people and write stories of our research, "singing" our own kind of "songs."

Collective Stories, Rap Music, and Performance Ethnography

Stories are key concepts in our research. Wolcott (1994) suggested that qualitative researchers need to be storytellers, and storytelling should be a primary characteristic of research practice. When researchers describe their studies, they additionally tell stories about themselves, since all writing is allegorical and, at some level, autobiographical (Clifford, 1986). When we write research, we also write our selves. According to Hall (1991), "identity is a narrative of the self; it's the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are" (p. 16). Through autoethnography (Ellis, 1999; Holt, 2003; Richardson, 1997) and narrative ethnography sharing participants' stories (Denzin, 2003), we open up critical space to investigate alternative qualitative research methods while re-framing leisure studies and recreation practices as a political realm deeply rooted in cultural processes (Rojek, 1997). In some sense we are working to situate the politics inherent in "the meeting up of stories," each already with its own spaces, geographies, culture, and history, while also "meeting up with others who are also journeying, also making histories" (Massey, 2000, p.230). Echoing Maya Angelou, Ellis (1998) wrote that new qualitative conceptualizations for research "may not necessarily provide the answer to a question or a complete solution to a problem; rather it opens up promising directions for further inquiry or efforts" (p. 10). She added that the aim "is not to write the end of an existing story but to write a more hopeful beginning for new stories" (Ellis, 1998, p.10).

[Karen] I remember the first time I listened to the digital recordings of Boyle Street students. The instrumental backgrounds were too loud, the words too fast, the violence almost overwhelming. I sought written lyrics over listening. With time, I learned to simply listen over and over again, feeling for rhythm, emotions carried through sound waves, and the particular accent and flow of the rap lyrics. When watching them perform in class, with headphones or on stage, I now bring myself to a presence around the heritage and resistance of rap, the particular stories of the students at Boyle Street, and their challenge to my way of life.

Recent scholarship in cultural studies and qualitative research around "doing" narrative ethnographies (Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003; Denzin, 1997; Giroux, 2001; Glover, 2003; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Richardson, 1997), as well as Indigenous research approaches (Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2001, 2003), assert that storytelling offers useful ways of knowing as well as provides for the construction of counter-narratives capable of intervening in and disrupting dominant discourses. Richardson (1997) seeks a "kind of narrative that gives voices to those who are silenced or marginalized in the [dominant] cultural narrative" (p.5). "*Collective stories* [as she calls them] are based in the lived experiences of people, and deviate from the [dominant] cultural story, provide new narratives; hearing them helps individuals to replot their lives because they provide an alternative to absent or powerless texts" (Richardson, 1997, p. 58). Here, rapping acts as a "performance of possibilities" (Madison, 2003) and a means of countering negative stereotypes and contesting dominant cultural stories told about marginalized people.

We contend that rapping operates as a type of performative storytelling. Denzin (2003) explained that research around "performance" considers the "ways that people create, and continue to create themselves through communicative action" (p. 8). A performative act such as making a rap song "puts culture in motion... it performs, narrates, examines the complex ways in which people experience themselves" (Denzin, 2003, p. 8). Furthermore, young people's rap performances carry political and social consequences:

> Performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency. Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience. In this way, performance is a form of agency, a way of bringing culture and the person into play. (Denzin, 2003, p. 9)

Collective stories are also often capable of eliciting a response that connects people, builds empathy and fosters a shared sense of "that's my story [too]. I am not alone" (Richardson, 1997, p.33). Told through music and lyrics, songs are clearly capable of operating as similar types of collective stories. For instance, when a favorite song is heard on the radio, it may elicit the response: "that's my song too, I am not alone." Listening to music involves a co-production through which social meanings are constructed in an ongoing process of reinterpretation. More than just bringing the culture and person of the performer into play, musical stories bring *us*, as researchers, educators, advocates, scholars, and *listeners* into play as well, as *co-producers*. Listening to young people and

sharing the processes of creating music together creates new spaces for dialogue, and new spaces for being and becoming better able to respond to each other.

> [Karen] I have a whole new vocabulary about hip-hop: "hella props" (much respect), for "phat beats" (good rhythms to dance to) and "spitting rhymes" (rapping) with "mad flows" (impressive use of words and complex rhythms in a rap vocal). Furthermore, it is a vocabulary that is not particularly useful with my working- and middle-class students at the university. Rap and hip-hop are a distant world to them. Out of a class of forty, only one—a young, black woman—listened to or could identify rap and hip-hop artists. Many of the others dismiss rap and hip-hop as "not music" and violent. They have no need to listen or wonder. I ponder how they will be able to implement recreation programs if they cannot hear the lives of the young people. I deliberate about how I will structure stories and lectures so these students can hear. I struggle to describe a leisure practice that includes respect and space for the resistance and soul of rap and hip-hop.

What do we (dis)miss in leisure practice?

Attention to listening practices offers an important alternative to the dominance of both the visual and the primacy of the voice/speaker in contemporary culture (Chambers, 1990; du Gay, Hall, Janes, MacKay, Negus, 1997). For example, while out recording urban sounds for a soundscape composition (or aural collage) the following "scene" occurred between Brett and a young Aboriginal woman, who goes by her graffiti name or "tag" of "LiGhTsWiTcH."

As we crossed 104th Street into downtown, an extremely loud car passed by and overloaded the microphone. We shut off the recorder for a moment, and began recording again just as a car horn honked when we opened the door to enter the City Centre mall, and the sound echoed eerily around the foyer.

LiGhTsWiTcH: *Between nighttime and daytime, it always looks different.*

Brett: *That [horn] was cool. I hope that got recorded!*

[Brett] Perhaps I dismissed this comment, because I had no clue that some homeless young people quite literally live and sleep in the City Centre mall. Later, LiGhTsWiTcH explained the differences between nighttime and daytime in the City Centre mall—during the day the space is full of office workers and business people in suits and ties. At night, it is the best place for homeless youth to get indoors and sleep off the streets. She knows that as the security guards make their rounds, street-frequenting youth can sleep in 30-minute segments before the guards return and tell them to move on. This type of knowledge is important, not only as a vital survival skill for LiGhTsWiTcH, but also to me, as I learn to understand the importance of leisure and music in her life—particularly in the all night spaces of downtown such as "after-hours" dance clubs.

In the following passage, LiGhTsWiTcH explained how important these all-night dance clubs are to her, and Brett could begin to understand that if not for these "after hours" clubs, there is one more night she'd be outside on the streets. Here is a paradox, for although clubbing keeps her off the streets, she often used a variety of drugs,

especially ecstasy, speed, and crystal meth, to help her to stay awake to dance. These drugs also offer a pleasurable escape from the difficult realities of everyday life. As we were walking through downtown, she explained:

> I'm not into hip-hop as much as I am into, like, um, techno and house, and trance and stuff. I use that type of music to get away from my everyday occurrences, and you know, like every Friday night I go to the club, you know, to fucking have a good time and party and like, get away from the weekday stresses of stuff.

Later on in their sound collecting walk through downtown, LiGhTsWiTcH showed Brett to a vacant club (called "Lush") at the end of a long brick alleyway[4].

> LiGhTsWiTcH: *I wanna show you the gum wall.*
>
> Brett: *Gum wall?*
>
> LiGhTsWiTcH: *This wall, ever since Lush has opened, has been here, and you're not allowed gum in the club, so there's this BIG wall and you put your gum on it. I believe it is down this little alley. Sorry, it's kinda grungy down here. This is the old Lush alleyway, its kinda gross... nice graffiti though.*
>
> Brett: *I never knew what was back behind this club...*
>
> LiGhTsWiTcH: *Um, this is the entrances to Lush, but Lush isn't open anymore...*
>
> Brett: *not open anymore...*
>
> LiGhTsWiTcH: *It kinda stinks funny, but here is the gum wall.*
>
> Brett: *Oh wow. That's nasty.*

LiGhTsWiTcH: *And it's REALLY thick, with gum. It's pretty gross actually.*

Brett: *This is such a creepy little alleyway.*

LiGhTsWiTcH: *Um, yes, yes it is. How many times I've sat here and smoked up I don't know.*

Brett: *Looks like someone is living here right now.*

LiGhTsWiTcH: [nonchalantly] *Yeah, a lot of people do. It's cool though. See, you're seeing things from a street kid's perspective.*

[Brett] In retrospect, it troubles me to hear the lack of consideration in my use of words describing the alleyway as "nasty" and "creepy" when it was clearly an important space to LiGhTsWiTcH. Yet, there is a gentleness and acceptance from her as she teaches me to see things from a new "street kid's perspective" and guides me through the spaces of her everyday life.

In *Outlaw Culture* (1994), bell hooks claimed that "talking critically about popular culture [is] a powerful way to share knowledge, in and outside the academy, across differences, in an oppositional way" (p. 4). She added that "cultural studies that looks at popular culture has the power to move intellectuals out of the academy and into the street" (1994, p. 4). This movement characterizes Brett's experiences with students in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, seeing—and hearing—things from new and different perspectives. These perspectives are best characterized as a space of paradoxical tensions between often fuzzy and fluid polarities, a space where we can work the borders between rigid binary oppositions such as good/bad or right/wrong, "opening up a hybrid space for

intellectual work" (Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 10) and critical leisure practice and research.

> [Karen] He stood, headphones securely on his head, singing the lyrics from *Body Rott* by the rap group "Bone Thugs N Harmony." "Clarke" had recently returned to school after stealing a car for joyriding, crashing it while running from the police, and suffering broken arms, multiple lacerations. He looked "like a mummy," disfigured, and faced a life of continual pain. Losing himself in the music, his voice got louder, swearing with the lyrics. A school staff person heard the vulgar language, and before Brett knew it, Clarke was suspended. I had met Clarke earlier, struggling with the courage of alcohol, to perform at a school talent show. I wondered about his punishment and this constant focus on only positive language and behaviour. At 14, his life was now in shambles, and surely the anger at the police and his own disfigurement needed space. His world encompassed lots of violence and now mostly pain. The school officials wanted him to speak in sanitized language. Of course, I understood the rules around language and the struggles to support to teach appropriate and respectful interactions. But where were the spaces for these awful feelings and realities? How honest, respectful, and real were we to dismiss and look away? The words "Body Rott" and "fuck" were explosive, real, forceful words for Clarke's reality. How would good social behaviour help him work through these issues? Where is anger appropriate? Where are these harsh, human feelings acceptable? What does leisure have to say to him and his situation?

Engaging with rap

Rap songs often present an intense re-performance of students' experiences, and are open to many interpretations—a rap song is "always already an interpretation *and* is in need of an interpretation" (Scott, 1992, p. 37). Many students have rapped about the harsh realities of "life on the streets" and their struggles with drugs, violence, prostitution, police, and suicide. Such lyrics are often beyond the limits of our understandings and experiences. In one rap, a student—"MC Novakane" (age 19)—rhymed:

I went from hard labor to nothing to making raps as something
Take a walk on the block too many bitches be frontin'
The noble Native receiving respect, replacing the hate
If I die in this world, Creator open the gate
Too much money and drugs, thugs killing for nothing
Elders cry up above, believe they're praying for something
Now twist, entwine, put my spirit in this rhyme
Mother Earth in chains, let me explain as I define

These lyrics required us to rethink our understandings of the importance of rap, the uses of language and style, and the unique hybrid of Aboriginal cultures and hip-hop music. MC Novakane expresses that after being in jail ("hard labor"), and being released and having nothing to do, rap music has become his creative focus. Importantly, MC Novakane (note "Novocain"—a substance that blocks pain) attributes his present survival to making rap songs. He additionally uses his lyrics as a form of social protest toward the violence he sees occurring around him. He goes on to insist: "let me explain as I define" a different set of ideas, words, and experiences. For instance, in his line "too many bitches

be frontin'" MC Novakane is rapping *against* the prostitution that he sees affecting Aboriginal women in the city. Yet, does his use of the word "bitches" paradoxically reproduce forms of sexual oppression and violence that he opposes? Perhaps this is so. Could it also be that "bitches" here is a term that indicates toughness and ability to survive on the streets despite great adversity?

Something similar might be said of the term "thugs." The late rapper Tupac Shakur certainly complicated this term, claiming "thug life" was more than a phrase about violence that also indicated a struggle for social justice in the face of extreme poverty and racism. Shakur described "thug life" as a new kind of civil rights movement: "Thug life is a new kind of black power," he said. "The code of thug life [is] a code to fix violence on the street. Shooting and drive-bys on the street, we're against it. I just try to speak about things from the street. My ear is to the street. It's like my battle cry to America" (Retrieved December 28, 2004 from http://www.lvcitylife.com/articles/2003/11/19/ae_cover/ae.prt).[5] It is not surprising, given this usage of the term, many Aboriginal youth who are living in poverty and experiencing racism readily identify with Tupac Shakur and consider themselves "thugs." Dimitriadis (2001b) noted that rap music offers young people a set of different and valuable skills:

> I came to see the kind of urgency young people (especially young men) invested in rap music and its often problematic images and messages in very different ways. I came to see their use of rap music, their constructions of invulnerable icons, their constructions of community, as one node in a much larger elaboration of resources for survival upon which young people drew. (p. 593)

What begins to emerge is that rap lyrics and musical styles require understandings of complex lived contexts and sometimes-conflicting meanings that young people employ in their rhymes and vocal lines. As researchers and practitioners, we can never be too sure that what we hear meshes with our own preconceived understandings and meanings. We struggle to engage in shared dialogues with young people about the ways that we construct and negotiate issues of identity and culture such as gender, race, and power. Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) argued that:

> most of the struggles over social justice are about the domination, slicing, oppression, and marginalization of specific identity groups. Identity thus has much to do with power (either empowerment or disempowerment) and with learning how to position oneself within historic struggles over power. (p. 12)

[Karen] The young people express their own dreams and hopes for a better life. I, too, want places of safety, regular access to good food and housing, opportunities for productive activity, and access to recreation. But what does that really mean? What would good, safe housing and a functional family look from the perspective of these young people? Would it be a family of friends? Given their level of education and their resistance to dominant and discriminatory society, what jobs would they really want? How would they [we?] work out the oppression and discrimination, the need to bend to authority? What would a life, home, job look like that truly respected their stories and lives?

Hip-hop is a way that many young people "learn how to position" themselves, as well as contest how they have been positioned, within historic and ongoing struggles over power. With this in mind, we recognize that anger and violence are aspects of leisure that are often negatively labeled, deemed inappropriate, or silenced. But where else than a rap song, would it be as fantastic to hear an explosion of anger, expletives, and an outpouring of emotion and self-expression? Furthermore, in the depths of social struggles against racism, poverty, addictions, and so on, when is anger an appropriate response to cultural violence? Where it would be too easy to dismiss rap music as full of anger and violence, we need to recognize that many young people turn to making raps as an alternative to participating in that kind of violence. In one rap called "Rhyme Spree" (a pun on the phrase "crime spree"), a young man who goes by "MC Rasta P" sang of his struggles:

Yeah, I had a lot of family and friends, but in the end I was all alone,

Try to ask the man in the mirror, get the same answer from my clone.

Should have known my own reflection will show me no direction.

My advice? Learn from mistakes, don't think you can have perfection.

Always trying to do my best, putting the rest to rest

Cause all the stress makes me restless like my head's compressed.

Getting full of all these sick thoughts, these feelings I'm just shedding,

Like peelings across the ceiling, you don't even know how I'm feeling man,

I'm just feeling rough, feeling fucking rugged and raw,

Can't still be thugged out and staying away from the law,

The Lord helps me out in this world cause it's hard,

When the darkness lays man, it's so hard, it's like a fucking fog.

> [Brett] After working together for several months, MC Rasta P showed me his diary/journal/lyric book. In it, he'd written a list of "ten things I can do to stay out of trouble today" as he struggled with the conditions of his probation and addictions. The number one item was "write lyrics" followed by "play pool" and "visit my grandfather." Here I began to see the importance of leisure in this young person's life, a space of expression, solace, and respite "when the darkness lays." I believe that I can best support MC Rasta P by helping him to continue making songs, recording his own raps, and making CDs of his own music.

Power, control, rules, and resistance in practice and research

In an early experience with students from the school, Brett learned that the rules he had learned in leading previous recreation programs did not apply very well at Boyle Street:

> [Brett] Today a group of staff/students went to the civic arena for an exhibition pro ice hockey game... holy cow, the students were sooooooooooooo out of control—over half of them ran ahead, took a different subway train than us to get there, arrived in front of the rest of us, didn't go into the game, and some just stayed outside and smoked the whole time. I'm pretty sure a bunch of them got totally stoned too. After the game, some never went back to the school, and the others were just really wound up, running all over the trains, confronting passengers, RAPPING at them! It was somewhat funny and strangely enjoyable to see them be so disruptive, confronting older (adult) white folks who were staring at them on the train, and generally refusing to participate in a school field trip they had little interest in doing. The school staff was somewhat

> uninvolved, walked to/from the subway station separately from the students, sat by themselves to watch the game, then likewise returned to the school... it was a very hands-off approach, and I was a bit freaked out by that, and it almost seemed like it was a field trip for the teachers instead of the students. Granted, the students are very street-wise and can get around and take care of themselves, but I thought a little bit of structure or ground rules for at least staying together as a group would have been important. At least, that's how I always ran events and programs before...

This passage from Brett's journal highlights issues of power, especially in terms of having participants do things they were not involved in deciding to do, nor were particularly interested in doing. Additionally, this event points to a moment where Brett realized how attempts to control and "rule" participants were inappropriate and even harmful for working with these young people. The potential to do harm exists in attempts to manage, normalize, or otherwise control youth who have already had too many damaging experiences through adult attempts to establish control. In this we hear echoes of McLaughlin (1993), who noted: "the majority of youth-serving programs view youth as a problem and try to fix, remedy, control or prevent some sort of behavior" (p. 59). While the approach of the school staff toward the students conveyed an ambivalent mixture of respect (i.e., students can take care of themselves) and dismay (i.e., they are beyond our control), this narrative shows how students were "speaking" about the event throughout the day, telling staff that they were not interested and would rather do something else, and yet these voices were mostly unheard. What the staff (including Brett) heard was defiance and disobedience. When Brett went to sit with students

smoking outside the hockey arena, he engaged in a meaningful conversation that revealed that these students had no interest in watching hockey, and some resented missing "music class" to attend a sporting event. It was at that point that Brett began to recognize what he had been dismissing, and started listening.

As we developed reciprocal relationships with the young people in the project we moved into other roles, such as listeners, collaborators, advocates, and friends (Finley & Knowles, 1995). These are in addition to the different historical, political, and cultural locations we bring to the project. For example, before moving to Alberta from Ohio—and although he has been a musician/drummer for over 20 years and has worked in recording studios as an audio engineer—Brett did not listen to rap music, thought mostly of graffiti as an urban blight, had little appreciation for the skills required to write and perform skilful vocal rhymes, and felt next to no appreciation for the physicality involved in breakdancing. In short, hip-hop culture was more foreign to Brett than western Canada. Furthermore, it was difficult for him to conceive that, as someone who was largely dismissive of rap and hip-hop culture, he was somehow complicit in its construction, enduring stereotypes, and the perpetuation of negatively associated meanings.

> [Brett] I question where I first got the idea that rap music was dangerous and bad stuff—where did this come from? Is rap all about money, drugs, thugs, guns, and sexual deviance? As a white kid growing up in a middle-class suburb, I was not exposed to many of these things, except through the media. When I first started working with rappers in the recording studio, where did my uneasiness with "them" come from? Now, I begin to see how I have internalized and perpetuated systems of representations of hip-hop youth as "dangerous others" always entwined with symbols

> of deviance and violence, and through which rap is essentially a scapegoat for more prickly social problems. I struggle to understand how this type of thinking is part of larger social strategies of containment, and how I have been playing along without really even knowing that I was, or knowing why... Even at BSEC, I struggle to question how I am perpetuating dominant ideologies about leisure, recreation, and young people. How are terms such as "at-risk" part of historically constructed ways of reasoning developed by dominant groups to establish what counts as "acceptable" leisure behaviour? Who gets to say so?

> [Karen] I also had to grapple with the meaning of the research. Colleagues dismissed, out-of-hand, that rap and hip-hop were music or meaningful. The ideal of leisure revolves around freedom and choice, yet here was a form of little interest to many leisure scholars and practitioners. Hip-hop as part of a recreation program is merely the "moves" put to sanitized and acceptable music. Lost are the resistance, the struggle to voice life as lived by some, and the creation of new identities. Recreation designed for these young people often edited out the realities, the language, and the action preferring to focus on "socially appropriate" behaviours.

Discussion: Narratives and listening in leisure research

In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, a primary challenge has been in writing about how the multiple ways we are involved in the project require us to reconsider how creating music works in terms of "creating leisure research." Along these lines Ellis (1999) wrote

of creating he*art*felt autoethnography (emphasis in the original). Ellis (1999) describes this concept as:

> an ethnography that includes researchers' vulnerable selves, emotions, bodies, spirits; produces evocative stories that create the effect of reality; celebrates concrete experience and intimate detail; examines how human experience is endowed with meaning; is concerned with moral, ethical, and political consequences; encourages compassion and empathy, helps us know how to live and cope; features multiple voices and repositions readers and "subjects" as coparticipants in dialogue; seeks a fusion between social science and literature in which, as Gregory Bateson says, 'you are partly blown by the winds of reality and partly an artist creating a composite out of the inner and outer events'; and connects the practices of social science with the living of life... to extend ethnography to include the heart. (p. 669)

And to include the ears. As Mahiri and Conner (2003) point out, the voices and views most egregiously absent in discourse about youth and social issues are those of young people themselves. Yet, we also must address the power and authority of our voices and views as researchers. Here, we are "working the hyphens" (Dimitriadis, 2001b; Fine, 1998) in constructing "self-other relationships" in the context of the project as not only researchers and recreation providers, but also through a whole range of roles, as researchers, musical collaborators, and writers. Similarly, participants are not objectified "Others" to be observed and studied at distance. Working the hyphens is a crucial event in qualitative research that questions:

> how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are multiple in those relations... [working the hyphens] means creating occasions to discuss what is and what is not 'happening between', within the negotiated relations of *whose* story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence. (Fine, 1998, p. 135)

For many of us involved in the project, rap music is a way of starting discussions about important social issues, and a way of telling meaningful stories about hopes, dreams, and struggles. At a recent "Hip-Hop Congress", Maya Angelou noted:

> Poetry is out for the time being, and something that is called rap or hip-hop is in. It is still poetry, and we can't live without it. We need language to tell us who we are, how we feel, what we're capable of—to explain the pains and glory of our existence... we are characterized by the need to create stories, songs, and poems, and we continue to create. (Retrieved June 13, 2004 from http://hiphopcongress.com/expression/poetry/poetry_archive_angelou.html)

The Beat of Boyle Street engages us in processes of creating rap songs and stories "to explain the pains and glories" of our shared and yet different existence. Rap and hip-hop are aural "windows" into the souls of the young people at Boyle Street Education Centre. The power of rap and hip-hop, like poetry, is to touch the soul and intertwine levels of meaning. The power of the program is the power of touching what is important, meaningful, and connected to their identities. We are not sure the study of recreation has

really rested in areas where the world is tough, violent, vicious, and dangerous. We often come to give a positive experience, and we see that as valuable. But the dark side remains dark when it is not explored, addressed, and heard. So many philosophers, authors, and psychologists reinforce a need to hear, look, and touch the dark side. Yet, we hope for more for these young people, but are unsure of how to frame it. We are acutely aware of Levinas's (Burggraeve, 2002; Dudiak, 2001) assessment that in dialogue we will make the other like us and do violence to the radical alterity of that person. We hope for a safer, more positive existence for these young people but wonder where are the spaces to explore this more positive world on their terms, not the practices of dominant society?

> [Brett and Karen] We can no longer walk past the "outcasts" on the street—the young people in hip-hop clothing, the men and women in tattered, dark, dirty clothing, the men struggling with grocery carts and bicycles stacked with recyclables, the young panhandling for change. We know some of them may be connected to Boyle Street students; all have stories. Our leisure encompasses them—stopping to help or eat with them, hearing their stories, discovering their struggles, witnessing both their pain and their hope, engaging in new rhythms.

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[1] Boyle Street Education Centre is part of the Boyle Street Community Co-Operative, an inner city agency providing basic social services to people in need.

[2] There are four "traditional" elements of hip-hop: Emcee-ing (rapping), breakdancing (B-Boy/B-Girl), DJ-ing (turntablism), and graffiti art. Thus the culture around hip-hop is constructed intertextually. In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, participants often use the terms "rap" and "hip-hop" generically and interchangeably, particularly when "rap" is a subset of hip-hop. Krims (2000) provides a concise summary (p. 10-12) of the debates around differences between "rap" and hip-hop."

[3] The name "MC Ed Mile" is a creative appropriation and play on the Eminem film titled "8 Mile." "Ed" refers to Edmonton, and provides an indirect rhyme to "8". This is an

example of how young people borrow from broader, global popular culture, and use it in new ways in local contexts.

[4] The sounds we collected that day were used later to create a soundscape composition to accompany LiGhTsWiTcH's entry into Edmonton's centennial celebration "City of the Future" contest. Her model city was composed of an underground city built of broken computer circuit boards with a "toxic" river of sludge running beneath a shining above-ground city of glass and affluence. In this dystopic vision of the future of Edmonton, where all the poor people lived underground, the filtered and distorted sounds recorded on our walk to the alleyway behind "Lush" played in a continuously repeating loop. She won first prize in the contest.

[5] William Raspberry in his January 17, 2005 editorial for the *Washington Post* (www.washingtonpost.com) suggests that young African-Americans do not see much evidence that good behaviour will do much more than making non-African-Americans less uncomfortable with them. And Paul VanDevelder in his January 13, 2005 commentary for *the Los Angeles Times* (www.latimes.com) provides a similar story connected to the experiences of Native Americans.

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Making music, re-making leisure in *The Beat of Boyle Street* (or, "*The Beat* goes on...")

Brett D. Lashua

Making music, re-making leisure in *The Beat of Boyle Street*
(or, "*The Beat* goes on...")

> "You see, some people may not have noticed, and some people may not like it, but the truth is we're living on a hip-hop planet" (Neate, 2003, p. 5).

If indeed we are living on a "hip-hop planet," as Neate argues, what stories are young people telling through their creation and use of music to support the "truth" of such claims? How may leisure researchers, educators, and practitioners listen to and engage with young people and their stories to better understand what is at stake for youth in hip-hop and leisure? What theoretical lenses, methods, and interpretive frames of understanding are available for leisure research with youth hip-hop cultures? My doctoral research, *The Beat of Boyle Street*, has grappled with these questions within the context of a recreational music production program for young people, facilitating musical leisure, and retelling the stories of my engagements and journeys with young people creating songs, identities, and cultures through the program.

Broadly speaking, my research has examined relationships between leisure and popular culture. While it is clear that popular culture has been variously and contentiously defined (Storey, 1997; Strinati, 1995), it remains less clear where pop cultural meanings, uses and contexts fit within the rubric of leisure studies. Each notion—"popular," "culture," and indeed "leisure"—carries specific theoretical and political inflections. Thus the idea of politics is central to any analysis of popular culture, and our evaluations of popular *leisure* will inevitably embody different forms of politics (Strinati, 1995). My research asked questions around what is at stake in making claims

about leisure practices as popular culture, and asked how leisure scholarship engages and explores the politics of popular culture.

The stories which comprise my research "reports" represent a bricolage, pastiche, or "remix" of theories, methods, and analyses that reshape and remake contemporary understandings of leisure, music, and youth cultures. At times, finding my way through the creative processes of writing this "story" has been a messy endeavor, as I searched/researched for metaphors or "maps" (McCotter, 2001) to help guide me along the way. Envisioning new metaphors was an invaluable technique for navigating the research and writing processes, and I have drawn from art (Bochner & Ellis, 2003), dance (Janesick, 2000), music (Dixson, 2005), and performance (Conrad, 2001) in order to shape the research remix. This remix responds to Laurel Richardson's (1994) challenge for rethinking and writing about theory:

> In standard social scientific writing, the metaphor for theory is that it is a 'building.' Consider a different metaphor for theory. Write a paragraph about theory using your metaphor. Do you 'see' differently and 'feel' differently about theorizing when you use an unusual metaphor? (p. 524)

The question "What if we used a different metaphor?" invites researchers to explore new theoretical angles, different modes of representation, and opens spaces for new stories and relationships. The journey of my doctoral research was, in many ways, a search for "unusual" metaphors to connect, resonate, echo, and amplify the theoretical, artistic, practical, and interpretive processes of leisure, music, and popular cultures.

Musical leisure research

In recent years leisure research has been increasingly sensitive to alternative methods and modes of research and representation (Glover, 2003; Kivel, 2005; Klitzing, 2004; Outley & Floyd, 2002; Perry, 2003; Stewart & Floyd, 2004) drawing from a variety of critical, interpretive, postmodern, poststructural, feminist, and critical race theoretical frames. For example, while locating research "visualizing leisure," Stewart and Floyd (2004) noted how different visual methods and approaches illuminated new ways to theorize leisure:

> There is an overwhelming, yet curiously unnoticed, bias toward the verbal and numeric... From various directions, several leisure researchers also have recognized problems with traditional approaches and actively encouraged the development of new methodology to understand the problems of leisure... Visual leisure is one of many forms of representation. It is the elicitation of research approaches that recognize the relevance of vision to ways we make sense of leisure in our lives... [in order to] enhance our ability to conceptualize people's leisure and to improve communication with the way we represent people's leisure. (p 448-449)

The approach to leisure research which I have "cobbled together" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998) through popular culture, hip-hop music, and audio production required developing "new rhythms" and "remixology" to partially re-theorize, remix, and represent the "soundscapes," stories, and "performances" voiced through *The Beat of Boyle Street* music program. My research connected music to the ways that we (Brett *and*

the young people in the program) make meaningful sense of our lives, struggle for self-representation and self-determination, question how identities are consumed, produced and performed, and articulate the relationships involved in doing leisure research. Thus, my interests were not only the sonic texts that were created in the music program, but also the relationships created *between* texts and contexts (Weiner, 2003). These "texts" connect us to broader social processes at work in the research program where we used computer technology and audio production software to make and recreate our own music. du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus (1997) described how new media technologies operated as locales for (re)making cultures:

> Meaning making lies at the interface between culture and technology... each of these new media technologies has a particular set of practices associated with it—a way of using them, a set of knowledges or 'know how,' what is sometimes called a social technology. Each new technology, in other words, both sustains culture and produces or reproduces cultures. Each spawns, in turn, a little 'culture' of its own. (p. 23)

In many ways, my research was a struggle to explore this interface, between audio production and cultural (re)production. In these "little cultures" or localities, young people are taking the cultural resources made available to them (such as hip-hop songs) and using them as "templates" for refashioning something new, maintaining some connectedness with global cultures, yet creating new local meanings, "infused with distinct knowledges and sensibilities" (Bennett, 2000, p. 27). In *The Beat of Boyle Street*, for example, where over 90% of participants report Aboriginal heritage, where most students struggle with "generational poverty," and nearly all have had difficulties with

education, the "sensibilities" which are integral to many young peoples' lives were voiced through their hip-hop musical compositions.

Working the hyphens/Dancing in the borderlands

In other ways, I struggled to locate and balance "my voice" within traditions of academic writing that, as Frith (1987) noted, tended to explain away the value and meaning of popular music, or bury it under layers of analysis. Here, debates about whether interpretative accounts can accurately or adequately depict, describe, or portray social life have been labeled the "crisis of representation" (Clifford, 1986). These debates point out that any rendering of lived experience is partial and incomplete, written by a particular author who comes from a particular standpoint and who wants to advance (both knowingly and unknowingly) a particular cause or interest (Richardson, 2000). As such, the "complex relationships to youth voice" (Weis & Fine, 2003, p. 122) require the researcher/ethnographer to respectfully listen, reflect, acknowledge one's own voice, and reconnect various threads of participants' stories to tell a new, different, and broader story. In doing so, the researcher opens spaces through which all involved can engage in "critical and supportive analysis, involving prodding and facilitating by other youth and adults" (Weis & Fine, 2003, p. 122). Fine (1998) refers to this process as "working the hyphens" in constructing self-other relationships, recognizing whose story is being told, by whom, for whom, and why.

Working the hyphens requires attending to tensions that circulate around issues of representation. In the contexts of my research, "hyphen work" involved negotiating the social differences between myself and young people at BSEC through music making.

Representational politics resonated through my research, framing the inclusion of music, voices, and stories in written research reports as attempts to reflect the collaborative, creative musical processes of the research. Again, Stewart and Floyd (2004) claimed that there is a fundamental shift occurring in leisure research relationships between the researcher and participants. They noted "approaches to research are being developed that recognize meaning is co-produced between researchers and participants, and typically position participants with more influence regarding their representation" (Stewart & Floyd, 2004, p. 451). Atkinson and Hammersly (1998) remind us that ethnographic work always requires a representation of others "even when it does not explicitly claim to speak for or on behalf of them.... there are ethical and political responsibilities arising from this fact" (p. 120). My work responds to these responsibilities as a postmodern bricolage or musical remix based on abilities to evoke the "narrative truth" (Ellis, 1999) of the feelings and importance of music in young people's everyday lives. This narrative montage has the potential to connect speakers, listeners, and readers in order to find "a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or your very own" (Ellis, 1999, p. 674). In working the hyphens, we connect across multiple and varied kinds of "borders," forge new relationships between leisure and popular culture, and create new contexts to touch and connect with the lives of young people. I consider this an important aspect of "remaking leisure" which serves to challenge and broaden the discursive field.

New metaphors, new meanings

The Beat of Boyle Street also explored new metaphors and meanings for leisure research. Richardson (2000)—writing in terms of validity in poetic and autoethnographic

research representations—argued that the "central imaginary for 'validity' for postmodernist texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach" (p. 934). The crystal metaphor opens up possibilities of multiple angles of refraction or interpretations, new lenses of knowing, and a fluidity of shapes for representations. My work has recognized many of these qualities in the musical remixes of *The Beat of Boyle Street*—multivoiced, multiperspective, and taking many musical shapes.

However, my research admittedly presents limited "sound bites" and samples of *The Beat of Boyle Street*. Echoing Haraway (1991), Orlie (1994) wrote "there is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective knowing" (p. 686) and therefore we need to bring as many different perspectives as possible to bear on any thing or idea, a plurality of perspectives. In a plural, borderland space (or like scattered refractions of light through a crystal), there is a proliferation of potential meanings, a "preservation of plurality" (Orlie, 1994, p. 691). In other words, new questions, meanings, and understandings of leisure, youth identities, and hip-hop cultures may be heard, emerge, or otherwise become possible when approached through different theoretical, methodological, and interpretive prisms.

As I have approached and "danced" in the "borderlands" with these broader questions of popular culture and leisure in my research, I have adhered to the words of Turner (1996), who explained:

> Popular culture is a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined. The point of doing this is not only academic—that is, as an attempt to understand a process or practice—it is also political, to examine the power relations that constitute this form of everyday life and thus reveal the configurations of interests its construction serves. (p. 6)

In what follows I reconsider some additional implications of "doing" leisure research in popular musical contexts with young people. First, I explore some theoretical implications of "remaking leisure research." Second, I offer a brief "overview" of cultural studies and youth subcultural research. I do so with the aim of putting leisure studies in "conversation" with cultural studies research to rethink approaches to working with popular culture in leisure contexts with young people such as *The Beat of Boyle Street*. Last, I offer a personal reflection about "closing" my involvement in the project through a narrative describing the "grand opening" celebration for the new location of Boyle Street Education Centre. This story stresses the importance and power of music and leisure practices that value and support young people's interests, particularly those practices engaged on the terms of young people themselves.

Remaking leisure research

The field of leisure studies has been slow—or perhaps even reluctant—to take up issues of popular culture. My research brings to the forefront an examination of a different set of leisure pursuits than what is typically examined in leisure studies. I take for a starting point the popular cultural complexities of what young people are doing with hip-hop music in their everyday lives. This is a significantly different focus than where

most North American leisure studies have been, where a majority of scholarship has privileged leisure that is seriously pursued, often removed from daily life, engaged through formal leisure delivery systems, and which provides "productive" or "positive" leisure "benefits" which accrue to the level of the individual (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Leisure, from my purview, is a space that is highly political, deeply embedded in social processes, and wondrously paradoxical.

There is a growing movement toward new leisure research conceptualizations. In the millennial special edition of the *Journal of Leisure Research* "Turning the Century: Reflections on Research," leisure scholars such as Samdahl, Kelly, Shaw, and Fox urged future researchers "to look outside of leisure studies and challenge us to maintain relevance with broader theory and social issues" (Samdahl, 2000, p. 125). Shaw suggested shifting focus to include pressing social issues, extending beyond the "intellectual isolation of leisure research" (2000, p. 149). She proposed "a broader view, a critical perspective and incorporation of cultural as well as other forms of analysis" (2000, p. 150). Kelly (2000) espoused a poststructuralist view rejecting harsh segmentations and separations of leisure from the cultural practices of everyday life. Fox suggested involving "views from cultural studies, critical theory, feminist scholarship, and postmodernism" (2000, p. 34) and added, "incorporating critiques and political action from points of view contrary to, or far removed from leisure, results in a more diverse community of recreation scholars" (2000, p. 35). Perhaps more drastically, Samdahl sought to "promote a radically different form of leisure studies" (2000, p. 128) altogether that attended to hegemonic power structures, postmodern forms, and alternate forms of

discourse. Earlier, Rojek (1997) had noted possibilities for shared theoretical lenses between leisure and other fields:

> Leisure theorists need to work with theorists working in cultural studies and communication studies to determine how culture affects leisure conduct. The models produced by cultural and communication theorists provide clues for students of leisure. But their prime defect is that they fail to address themselves to the subject of leisure. (p. 395)

It is with this "sage advice" in mind that I have undertaken my doctoral research in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, seeking to create a "remix" that necessarily and messily addresses theories and practices suffused with elements of leisure studies, cultural studies, and pop cultural musical artistry.

Towards a cultural studies of leisure

According to Strinati (1995), popular culture is defined "on the basis of the way it is explained and evaluated theoretically. Popular culture cannot be defined except in relation to particular theories" (p. xviii). My research has "mashed-up," and remixed perspectives from cultural studies, leisure studies, "theory about music" (Krims, 2000), and "samples" from various other perspectives (e.g., feminist, postmodernist, poststructuralist thought) in order to better understand the consumption and production of popular culture in *The Beat of Boyle Street*. In the broadest sense, this work contours part of a broader "cultural studies of leisure" that serves as an interdisciplinary space to question how leisure is acted out and represented in local cultural sites and also imagines how leisure studies may become different from how it is currently conceived (Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003).

Like leisure studies, no particular definition fully describes or positions cultural studies work. Cultural studies is interdisciplinary, and its adherents seek to continually interrogate and alter the field as different theoretical developments, social contexts, and research practices require. Cultural studies "offers a bridge between theory and material culture—its politics are contextual, local, strategic, and always open to rethinking and re-visioning" (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, 1992, p. 6). Very generally, cultural studies (CS) is concerned with subjectivity and power, that is, how human subjects are formed and experience their lives in cultural and social space. According to CS scholar Toby Miller:

> rather than limiting its focus to canonical works of art, governmental history, or quantitative social data, CS devotes time to subcultures, popular media, music, clothing, and sport. By looking at how culture is used and transformed by 'ordinary' and 'marginal' social groups, CS sees them not simply as consumers, but also potential producers of new social values and cultural languages. This focus on relations of consumption and the socialization of commodities foregrounds the centrality of the communications media in everyday life. (2002, p. 24)

Furthermore, in addition to looking beyond the "official" or "sanctioned" cultural forms within society, cultural studies has a history of commitment to social change for marginalized, oppressed, and silenced groups. Rooted in Marxist/neo-Marxist thought, CS seeks connections between theory and practice, or *praxis* related to the social, political, historical, and material conditions of people's everyday lives (Grossberg, 1994; Tomlinson, 1999).

In more specific terms of leisure and popular culture, cultural studies seeks to locate the power relationships that historicize, construct, and contextualize specific cultural practices. Rather than focus solely upon individual behaviours occurring in disconnected contexts, "leisure should be understood as integrally connected to wider relations of culture, status, and power, rather than being seen as some autonomous sphere of social life" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 64). Cultural studies espouses interdisciplinary work in "the belief that we have entered a period in which the traditional distinctions that separate and frame established academic disciplines cannot account for the great diversity of cultural and social phenomena that has come to characterize an increasingly hybridized, post-industrial world" (Giroux, 1994, Section 8, para. 2). The wealth of opportunities afforded in leisure and recreation contexts and practices provide innumerable links and intersections with cultural studies to this diversity. Exploring such links is imperative if leisure studies is to maintain relevance, for instance, with youth popular cultures, questioning and critiquing how youth leisure "fits" within a "better" or more "civil" society (Hemingway, 1999). Grossberg (1998) encouraged us to consider:

> If we are to imagine a different, a better future, we need to consider the different ways people participate in social, cultural, economic, and political life... for it is here... that we can examine how people make history, and articulate what history we would—collectively—hope to make. (p. 390, quoted in Carlson & Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 26)

"Making history": A short history of youth subcultural study

I am interested in remixing cultural studies and leisure studies to widen discussions about youth, popular culture, and leisure. While it is not my aim to attempt a broad synthesis of subcultural theorization, I want, briefly, to trace several trajectories of development that touch upon some aspects of the cultural studies repertoire related to thinking with concepts of young peoples' leisure. In the following developmental sketch or "periodization" of youth subcultural research, my intent is neither to create the perception that development occurred with a specific linearity, nor to suggest that the "moments" provided are not ongoing and overlapping. Rather I aim to generally outline particular interests, theories, and research that highlight approaches to and relationships between youth, popular cultures, and leisure practices.

Although questions of youth and "appropriate" leisure practices extend along various historical trajectories, researchers such as Bennett (2000), Carrington and Wilson (2001), Grossberg (1994), Nayak (2003), and Stahl (1999) each provide a basic point of entry into "rethinking" the question of youth through cultural studies with the "Chicago School" of Sociology in the 1920s/1930s (e.g., William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, 1981 [1943]; see also, Becker, 1973 [1963]; Merton, 1957). These early "cultural studies" argued that rather than a form of deviant individualism, youth "leisure"—e.g., gangs, street fighting, and drug use—should be understood in contexts of class and working-class communities. When primacy was given to the perspective of subcultural actors, many leisure practices did not look deviant, but *normal*, and studies framed as such allowed researchers to understand people's actions within their immediate cultural context (Nayak, 2003). Ethnographic studies of the "slums" (e.g., Whyte) were "less

concerned with the label of 'delinquent' or 'criminal' as with illustrating how the social structure of [the slum] produced particular forms of behaviour" (Bennett, 2000, p. 15). Most importantly, this perspective allowed that young people were generating their own social norms and group values, thus creating a "subculture" of their own. Bennett (2000) further noted that the subcultural explanation for youth behaviors became particularly popular following World War II, when economic prosperity did *not* result in reduced rates of crime among young people, nor did it produce a classless society. Dominant social thought perceived youth involved in "deviant" subcultures as "outsiders" who needed to be "corrected" and brought into mainstream society.

The view of subcultural actors as "outsiders" prevailed through the mass expansion of popular youth cultures in the Rock-N-Roll era. Popular cultures became a major focus of subcultural research, particularly as developed by researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham (UK). There, two major foci developed. First, CCCS researchers looked at style-based rather than gang-based youth cultures. Youth style was a central area for study not only because young people identify with popular music or trends, but also because youth relate *through* style to certain values and moralities that create a sense of community or cultural membership (Kelly, 2004, p. 3). Second, CCCS researchers sought to apply Marxist/neo-Marxist perspectives of class conflict to better understand youth reactions to structural changes in post-war society, such as opportunities for employment, and leisure for underemployed youth (Bennett, 2000; Stahl, 1999). Perhaps most significantly, CCCS work recognized youth and popular cultures as topics worthy of serious academic study

in their own right (Hall & Jefferson, 1976). I am not sure that North American leisure studies scholarship has engaged very well in discussions around these topics.

Leisure scholar-practitioners would gain new perspectives of leisure from conversations about the body of research that emerged from the CCCS. For example, in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Cohen (1987 [1972]) demonstrated how subcultural youth were portrayed as "folk devils" in mainstream British media, whereby popular culture was equated with "deviance," and through which the established hegemonic order could proclaim a broader set of social "moral panics" around youth and popular culture affinities. According to Nayak (2003), Cohen argued for a new kind of critical thinking that is:

> skeptical in the sense that when it sees terms like 'deviant,' it asks 'deviant to whom?' or 'deviant from what?'; when told that something is a social problem, it asks 'problematic to whom?' when certain conditions or behaviour are described as dysfunctional, embarrassing, threatening or dangerous, it asks 'says who?' and 'why?' In other words, these concepts and descriptions are not assumed to have a taken-for-granted status. (p. 12)

Cohen concluded that whatever solutions young people adopted as a means of expressing or articulating their struggles and dissatisfactions could in turn be condemned by mainstream society as a cause for "moral panic." Researchers such as Nayak (2003) and Conrad (2004) call for performative ethnographic research that provides counternarratives which interrupt common sense understandings of youth leisure

practices—e.g., rap as deviant, threatening or dangerous to whom?—and creates a more complex picture than one of "deviance and deficiency" (Conrad, 2004, p. 19).

In 1960s and 1970s Britain, "moral panics" emerged around highly visible youth subcultures—Teds, Mods, Rockers, Punks, and Skinheads—who were resisting traditional routes of socialization through school and into work (Hall & Jefferson, 1976). Research of subcultural "resistance through rituals" afforded "key sites for both ethnographic and theoretical investigation, inspired by a Gramscian [hegemonic] analysis of popular culture" (Cohen and Ainley, 2000, p. 84). That is, youth leisure was viewed as a contested terrain on which groups vie for power—both at the level of economic and symbolic hegemony. For example, in *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*, Willis (1977) argued that involvement in a seemingly deviant, lazy "Lad" subculture was part and parcel of processes preparing youth for menial working class "shop floor" jobs. Resisting school authority and generally slacking off were practices that, rather than acts of resistance, folded neatly instead into producing the types of behavior and "skills" used in the mundane workday world. Thus, acts of "resistance," ironically, often re-position social actors precisely within the locations that they were originally attempting to resist. Researchers at the CCCS offered developed key ethnographic approaches for studying youth identity construction and resistance (Carlson and Dimitriadis, 2003), particularly as these studies highlighted an important shift to key issues of language and representation, a "semiotic turn" that provided new ways of thinking about popular culture, representation, and youth style (Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1978).

However, during the 1980s, emerging postmodern and post-structural research offered critiques of classist, masculinist, and semiotic foci that were too narrow for emerging feminist and race-conscious analyses. Critiques of CCCS work began from its preoccupation with theoretical abstraction and a lack of engagement with young people themselves (Bennett, 1999; Dimitriadis, 2001a). For instance, Cohen (1987 [1972]) acknowledged: "Influenced by labelling theory, I wanted to study reaction; the actors themselves merely flitted across the screen" (p. iii). Additionally, CCCS research—heavily influenced by neo-Marxist theory incorporating Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony—preoccupied itself with notions of class structures among working-class white males (e.g., Cohen, 1972; Jefferson & Hall, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1978). Many published subcultural studies failed to account for the racialized and gendered experiences of youth. As researchers began to attend to broader issues and questions of cultural identity, the idea of a solid, unified subculture or subcultural identity frayed with the recognition that perhaps no such thing as an authentic, genuine subcultural identity exists.

Following these accounts, a new focus of study became the body (Sweetman, 2001), and a shift from "identity" to notions of "subjectivity" (Hall, 1996). In addition, postmodern feminist research offered more radical approaches than "simply including girls in studies, thus changing the masculinist values of the research process itself" (Nayak, 2003, p. 25). For example, McRobbie's (1980) work questioned the gendering of public space, the need for ethnographies of the culture of the bedroom, the production of teenage femininities and the importance of popular culture to young women. Work such as this led to further critiques not only of constructions of masculinity and femininity, but

also the accompanying heteronormativity that had naturalized notions of sexuality, while continuing to raise attention to other socio-cultural markers of difference such as race and class. Woven throughout, the heaviest critiques of semiotic, textual analyses were directed at the failure to engage with the lived experiences of young people, the acts and practices of young people themselves; specifically, what young people *do* to construct, resist, reproduce and create meaning in their everyday lives (Willis, 2000).

This heavily abbreviated overview of subcultural perspectives points to several later key developments that are useful when reconsidering intersections of youth cultures and leisure. First, as Muggleton (2000) and Bennett (1999) provide, current trends point toward the development of new ways to engage "postsubculturalists" whose "neo-tribal" communities are multiple and fluid, whose consumption is no longer exclusively "articulated through the modernist structuring relations of class, gender or ethnicity" and whose identities are defined by multiple stylistic influences (Muggleton, 2000, p. 52). Second, postsubcultural work attends to an ever-increasing mix of global and local "flows" of media, or cultural "cutting and mixing" (Hebdige, 1987) leading to hybridized "glocal" music cultures (Mitchell, 1999). Paying attention to how media is locally consumed and reproduced provides insights into the "process through which these global resources enter youth scenes, or about how these 'interpreted resources' [such as downloaded music files] are rearticulated and redistributed to other cultures" (Carrington & Wilson, 2001, section 3, para. 4). At present, research on both concepts has been left underdeveloped. These points will be considered further in this paper. At the moment, however, I want to provide a brief digression locating leisure studies research in regard to

questions of youth, deviance, and subculture. This will be followed by further contextualization of "post-subcultural" work.

"Making youth": Leisure studies and the demonization of young people

As outlined above, cultural studies researchers have dramatically rethought ideas of youth subcultures. Nevertheless, popular culture—particularly as *youthful* leisure culture—historically, has been undervalued across the academy (Hall, 1994; hooks, 1994; Storey, 1997). In leisure studies, I contend that, in part, the lack of attention to hip-hop and youth leisure is due to the enduring ways that the field has constructed (and positioned itself in relation to) young people and popular culture. In spaces where leisure studies traditionally has connected and engaged with young people, the field has overwhelmingly adhered to notions of deviance and serving "youth at risk" (Brentro, Brokenleg, and van Bockern, 2000; Kivel, 1998; McReady, 1997, Witt & Crompton, 1996). The "defensive" views held by many adults toward the effects of popular culture upon youth reinforce Dionysian/Apollonian (angel/devil; good/bad) social constructions of childhood (Halloway & Valentine, 2000). Binaries such as these eschew the power and potential of popular culture, digital media and the ability of young people to create their own meaningful leisure.

Often featured prominently in leisure research, terms such as "youth at-risk" are part of historically constructed ways of reasoning developed by dominant groups and social interests whose practices form "a scaffolding" of ideas which act to normalize young people deemed "in opposition to some general but unspoken norms about personal competence" (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998, p. 305). Traditional approaches to recreation

programs serving youth "at-risk" have been framed through lenses in which "the majority of youth-serving programs view youth as a problem and try to fix, remedy, control or prevent some sort of behavior" (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 59). For example, Witt and Baker (1997) worried of "unstructured, unsupervised, and unproductive" leisure time for "at risk" youth. They expressed further concerns that:

> appropriate adult supervision does not exist to help guide the constructive use of the available discretionary time; community resources for the positive use of discretionary time do not appear to be available; and young adolescents do not appear to have developed the interests or skills that would enable them to make positive use of the available time. (p. 19)

Note the valuation of leisure that is only "leisure" when it is "constructive" and "positive" and under adult surveillance and controlled through adult guidance. In the same spirit of "at risk" labeling, McReady (1997) decried, in spite of the best efforts of numerous recreation departments, "the percentage of youth who are 'at-risk' is increasing at such a rapid rate that some feel that our society as a whole may be at risk" (At Risk Youth section, para. 1). Statements such as this hint at "moral panics" while continuing to position young people as "outsiders" who need to be returned to the fold. McReady (1997) conceded that most studies of youth "at risk" have individualized or "blamed" the victim, and that "with the exception of Munson (1991), there has been little attempt to understand the leisure of youth within the context of their social environment" (1997, At Risk Youth section, para. 1). Yet even Munson (1991) described youth "at-risk" as "*socially disabled* because *they* have difficulty managing the tasks of daily living and are

at risk of having continuous problems in school, peer groups, and family relationships" (Munson, 1991, p. 28, my emphasis).

Perspectives such as these convey the prevailing conventional wisdom that there yet remains some sort of "mainstream" or "normal" society to which "others" must submit, subscribe, and participate—or "risk" the consequences. Tacitly unspoken, it is up to "them" to become more like "us." Ironically, it is youth "at risk" who are constructed as "dangerous others" (Mahiri & Conner, 2003) who threaten the ideas and values of "dominant" society. Paradoxes such as this open up questions around what is claimed and at stake in terms such as "at risk" and "leisure." For instance, feminist leisure researchers such as Kivel (2005), Perry (2003), Shaw (2001), Samdahl (2000), and Fox and van Dyck (1997) call for critical attention to issues of power, privilege, hegemony, and ideology. Drawing parallels between leisure and oppressive practices of racism, sexism, and ablism, Fox and van Dyck (1997) "choose to emphasize the writings of African-American women, black Canadians, Chicanos, and people with disabilities to illuminate, not their situations, but the actions and behaviours of those of us in the dominant group" (Section 1, para. 8). Such an emphasis reveals ways power relationships are often at work *against* the very young people leisure scholar-practitioners are attempting to connect with and serve. Conrad (2004) shared similar concerns in her theatrical work with Aboriginal youth:

> I find the label 'at-risk' extremely problematic. I am particularly disturbed by the way in which being an 'at-risk' youth in Alberta highly correlates with being Aboriginal (Alberta Learning, 2001). I explore the ethical implications of the label, the act of labeling and the school and social

> structural factors that put youth 'at-risk' in my research. I problematize the fact that the majority of students at the school were of Aboriginal descent while the teachers, myself included, were predominantly white. (p. 19)

In a likewise fashion, Kivel (2005) asked leisure researchers to not only reflect upon the language that we use to describe participants, but also to situate our understandings of terms, categories, identities, and cultures within social, historical, and political discourses of leisure:

> Consider the terms in our literature that are theoretically abstract yet grounded in the discursive grammar of racism: 'underparticipation,' 'inclusion,' 'non-white,' 'marginalized,' 'inner-city,' 'at risk.' These specific terms emerge from a racist discourse because they are typically associated with persons of color with the assumption that whiteness is the norm. So, while we focus on describing the leisure experiences of individuals with varying markers of racial and ethnic identity (apart from an explicit focus on white racial identity) without also examining the ideological construction of such markers, we can easily miss the *discourses* of racism that are constructed and structured through leisure. (p. 25)

Without critically considering the deeply ingrained beliefs, terms, and practices of dominant groups in society, leisure researchers will inadvertently perpetuate oppressive notions of "at-risk youth" which are linked to particularly privileged understandings of age, race, class, gender, ability, style, and other markers of social status. Furthermore, while notions of privilege, whiteness, and established systems of power require continual

interrogation (McIntosh, 1991), we also require new language for leisure, as Kivel points out, that will allow for the proliferation of different meanings and multiple views of leisure.

Subculture to postsubculture

Subcultural research, particularly as developed through threads of British cultural studies provides useful lenses to begin thinking with hip-hop in *The Beat of Boyle Street*. At BSEC, many of the symbols of hip-hop culture are written on the bodies of young people, and convey certain aspects of a "subculture" shared among urban Aboriginal youth involved in hip-hop. The clothing style (baggy sportswear, oversize hooded jackets, unlaced sneakers), jewelry ("bling bling" in the form of chunky gold and silver necklace chains with pendants), and the language of rap slang are in everyday use, focused through overlapping lenses of race (First Nations/Aboriginal), class (poverty), style (oversize "EXCO" brand clothes), and space (predominantly defined as the north side of Edmonton). These characteristics also provide initial appearances that mimic some powerful uses of hip-hop in urban African-American culture (hooks, 1994) and around the globe (Bennett, 2000; Neate, 2003), articulated here through sociopolitical contexts of Edmonton's Aboriginal youth. However, if hip-hop has moved into the mainstream as a global, commercial form, how "workable" is the notion of any Aboriginal hip-hop "subculture" in Edmonton?

Recent developments in youth cultural theory have moved away from the idea of subculture and have applied concepts such as "lifestyles" as well as "neo-tribes" (Bennett, 1999). These concepts present "post-subcultural" approaches in that the idea of

a "subculture" is deemed too cohesive. That is, there is no one single unifying idea or theme (e.g., "punk") that speaks to all members of a group for very long or with total coherence. Furthermore, this work has emphasized that notions such as "authentic subcultures" are "produced by subcultural theorists, not the other way around" (Redhead, 1990, p. 53). Bennett (1999) argued:

> the concept of 'subculture' is unworkable as an objective analytical tool in sociological work on youth, music and style - that the musical tastes and stylistic preferences of youth, rather than being tied to issues of social class, as subculture maintains, are in fact examples of the late modern lifestyles in which notions of identity are 'constructed' rather than 'given', and 'fluid' rather than 'fixed.' (p. 599)

Bennett (1999) applied the concept of "neo-tribes" to refer to the loose, shifting, and temporary communities of young people (particularly in regard to dance, techno, and rave cultures). Post-subcultural analyses further represent a shift away from issues of race, class, sex, gender, age, etc., to issues of *culture*. For example, how do young people create temporary identities and loose local communities based upon *hip-hop culture*? In an example of this shift from *The Beat of Boyle Street*, "Kree-Azn" (age 20) explained:

> Hip-hop made me the person who I am today. I think I'd be selling drugs, I'd be in jail, or either I'd probably be dead right now without out that stuff. And I'm not one of those gangstas, I'm not a negative person, I'm straight-up positive. Yeah, that's who I be, I'm half Native and half Vietnamese. So, my boy was sitting there, and he knew that I was half Native and half Asian, he was like, 'yo, you know what would be a sick

> name for you? Kree-Azn' You know? Like, a word 'creative', like 'creation' or two races that click together, you know, like, it does the same thing with hip-hop, like, there's no certain race you have to be in hip-hop, there's no certain skin color, it's all about what's inside you, the creativity.

Similarly, "lifestyle" approaches emphasize:

> the role of the local as a means of understanding how collective cultural meanings are inscribed in commodities such as music and fashion. The stories such commodities tell, both to and about those who consume them, are in part determined by the industries that produce such commodities but in each instance completed by the consumer themselves. (Bennett, 2000, p. 27)

This passage captures a significant spirit of young people's musical practices in *The Beat of Boyle Street*—sampling from popular rap songs, mixing in a variety of other audio "bits" and lyrics replete with references and local characters and neighbourhoods. Lifestyle approaches represent analyses of socio-cultural issues as "ways of life" affecting and expressing youth identities (Hollands, 2002, p. 157). Lifestyle and post-subcultural perspectives help to account for the complexities inherent in youth leisure practices, as young people "sample" from broader mass mediated cultures and "complete" meanings at local levels (e.g., the MC name of "Ed Mile" is a creative adaptation from the Eminem film "8 Mile"—the "Ed" stands for Edmonton and offers an indirect rhyme/assonance to "8"). I want to turn next to several short narratives from my research where these types of analyses (however uneasily and/or temporarily) provide insights into the musical leisure of young people in *The Beat of Boyle Street*.

Flip Side Tribe: Neo-tribe?

A walk through downtown Edmonton or a ride on the city's light rail transit offers numerous instances where the letters "F.S.T." are spray-painted, graffiti-style, across brickwork, on subway station entrances, on bus stops, and "tagged" on a variety of available surfaces. These letters stand for "Flip Side Tribe." "F.S.T." is sprayed prominently on the front doors of the apartment building I moved into in the fall of 2004. "F.S.T." is the "tag" of a group of urban young people, primarily of Aboriginal heritage, engaged in hip-hop culture in Edmonton, and many members of "F.S.T." are participants in *The Beat of Boyle Street*. One young man, who goes by the personal graffiti tag of "Sion" explained to me that "F.S.T." originated to represent all four of the "elements" of hip-hop culture (graffiti art, MC rapping, DJ turntablism, and breakdancing). According to Sion, graffiti is about gaining the respect of peers and making a name for oneself across the city. Another student at BSEC, who goes by the name of "fr0lic," explained that rather than something perceived negatively like vandalism, "graffiti is your own personal expression, like poetry written on a wall" and she would much rather look at colorful graffiti than plain brickwork. Sion brought his paint-can skills and breakdancing abilities to the "F.S.T." group, whereas fr0lic is a breakdancer, and "MC Ed Mile" represents the rapping element. Other young people bring their distinct knowledge of each of the four elements.

"Flip Side Tribe" existed in various incarnations for approximately two years while I was at Boyle Street Education Centre, including around a dozen young people at its maximum (I was an "honorary" member, helping with music production). As the

"crew" gradually dissolved, some members moved on to form other breakdance groups (e.g., Lunacee, a B-Girl who now dances with the hip-hop "neo tribes" such as "Femme Arsenal" and "Red Power Squad"). Some gave up graffiti art because they did not wish to get caught, fined, or have a criminal record that prohibited other leisure activities (e.g., Kree-Azn began travelling abroad to attend youth conferences). Some members of "F.S.T." returned to rural reserves and started new rap performance groups (MC Jellybean). As a kind of "neo-tribe," "F.S.T." represented a loose collective of young people who tagged graffiti to claim urban space (Sion), rapped on subway trains to sing of the politics of poverty (Ed Mile's "Scrub with a bus pass"), and engaged in breakdancing battles to keep alive (Kree-Azn). "Flip Side Tribe" thus represented a mix of multiple cultural influences and global hip-hop "elements" nested within local pop cultural leisure contexts.

However, I consider the concept of a "neo-tribe" with a degree of caution and sensitivity. The word "tribe" carries racial, historical and political connotations—some positive, some less so. As a white, middle class, well-educated American, I am wary of neo-colonialisms, or unwittingly reproducing notions of a "tribe" as somehow uncivilized, savage or "less than" when employing this word. In this case, it is a word that young people chose for themselves. While the term comes with particular theoretical and ideological considerations, I am curious how researchers can understand and engage with the fluid, creative complexities enacted in groups such as "Flip Side Tribe" that might be deemed an ongoing, performative "neo-tribe." This conceptualization requires new methodological and analytical frames, as Denzin (2003) noted: "If the world is a performance, not a text, then today we need a model of social science that is

performative" (p. 11). If young people are participating in "neo-tribes" based around performative leisure practices, where and how does leisure research began to connect and respond to them?

I maintain that a beginning point for research requires considering the co-production (or co-performance) of listening to young people, and spending time in contexts alongside young people struggling to make sense out of the world around them (Hall, 2003). In doing so, leisure researchers and practitioners must take popular culture and hip-hop music more seriously. This is not only to understand the political investments that young people make in popular culture, but to question the deployment of power through research practices, at everyday levels of the "micro-politics" of the street, where leisure research must "attend more closely to how power circulates through and is productive in daily life" (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997, p. 306). For example, Ermond (2003) noted that "ethnographic approaches have the potential to empower young people in the research process. If undertaken in the proper spirit young people are given the power to control the pace of the research, the extent of access, and therefore the extent of the insight gained" (p 118-119). This sentiment is perhaps best articulated in a rap created by MC Ed Mile about public transport (a revised version of "scrub with a bus pass" presented in my research proposal). He rhymed:

Toonies, loonies, quarters, nickels, dimes

Investin' time writin' rhymes

Flip Side Tribe manifesting words on signs…

Then I kick a freestyle waitin' for the #9

Mine, the street stage, stereotype

People come in all sizes, brown, blue, hazel eyes

My five alive tribe, East West North South side…

Why drive? I'm on Indian time,

…hop the #3, met up with a bunch of peeps

took the cipher to the street,

Brett the vet composed the beat

from Boyle Street (we straight inner city!)

MC Ed Mile's rhyme reminds us that young people need to be in control of their own representations, and possess some sense of agency and power in an arena that sustains self-determination, creativity, and making music on their terms and turf. Researchers, educators, and practitioners may support and be included (to some extent) in these endeavors—e.g., I created backing rhythm track or "the beat" over which MC Ed Mile rhymed this track. According to Cohen and Ainley (2000), the current mandate is to "rework the youth question in the light of the larger theoretical debates, whilst at the same time struggling to create an alternative space of representation through direct interventions in the cultures of schooling, training and youth provision" (p. 88). In similar tones, Stewart and Floyd (2004) summarized three effects of "current" shifts in leisure researcher/participant relationships:

(1) The researcher becomes less central, less powerful, with a less defining role regarding the life world of the people and communities we study;

(2) Participants function as, and are more likely to view themselves, as collaborators in research rather than objects of study; and

> (3) The data generated are grounded in the culture of interest since it has been selected by those who live and experience it. (p. 452)

In other words, leisure researchers and practitioners need to take popular culture seriously because of the significance and power deployed in these leisure practices, with real effects and consequences in young people's lives, identities, and futures. Grossberg (1992) stated that popular culture "is a significant and effective part of the material reality of history, effectively shaping the possibilities of our existence" (p. 69). Popular leisure practices, particularly those related to hip-hop, often offer alternative recreational routes through alternative hip-hop worlds in which young people are challenging and re-interpreting the meanings and rituals ascribed to commodities and leisure-as-consumption practices (Connell & Gibson, 2003). While hip-hop music is commonly stereotyped and frequently misunderstood, Rose (1994) wrote:

> Rap [hip-hop] is a contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless. On this stage, rappers act out inversions of status hierarchies, tell alternative stories of contact with police and the education process, and draw portraits of contact with dominant groups in which the hidden transcript inverts/subverts the public, dominant transcript. (p. 101)

I add that hip-hop also provides new spaces to tell alternative stories of leisure and recreation. According to Cohen and Ainley (2000), these new spaces are facilitated by "a more sophisticated and reflexive approach to ethnographic work; the use of audio and video diaries, photo-mapping, storymaking and guided phantasy [which] have been variously tried as a means of developing a more dialogic and interactive approach to research with young people" (p. 88). Hip-hop musical practices resonate with the

contestation and inversion of dominant understandings of "what music is" or "what music means," often in ways knotted with social contradictions, paradoxes of meanings, and political complexities. Thus rap music—viewed through subcultural and post-subcultural lenses framed by cultural studies perspectives—challenges understandings of "what leisure is" and "what leisure means," offering new perspectives and more complex views of youth recreation practices and leisure provision.

The Beat goes on: A story of celebration

As I began closing my three years of research at Boyle Street Education Centre, the school moved from the cramped basement of the Boyle Street Community Co-Op into a larger building. The new space provided a dedicated music room that greatly facilitated our abilities to produce and record our own music. In the spring of 2005, the school held a "grand opening" event to celebrate the new space and share it with the public. The event, showcasing the musical talents of students in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, represented a bittersweet moment for me—the symbolic opening of the new space accompanied by the imminent closing of my research—to reflect on the centrality and importance of the music program in the lives of students, in my research, and in the life of the school.

In front of over 200 guests, school staff, parents, peers, government officials and press representatives from most major TV and radio stations in the area, students held the "starring" roles in presentations for the event, and their rap and dance performances were spotlighted throughout the celebration. A former student, B-Boy, graffiti artist, and beat boxer ("Kree-Azn"), who is now studying on a multimedia course at a higher education

college, was the emcee for the program. Dancing and spinning to traditional pow-wow music, a young woman ("Lunacee") performed as a fancy shawl dancer to lead the traditional entrance progression. She later switched back into her everyday "street clothes" and performed as a breakdancer, along with Kree-Azn and eight other students. MC "Jazzy-G" rapped the "unofficial" school anthem "*Somewhat representin'*"—the story of her struggles with domestic dislocation, poverty, pleasure, and education—and asked the audience to participate in a call and response:

Jazzy-G: "Boyle Street let me hear y'all! Boyle Street, say "what?!"

The crowd: "What?!"

Jazzy-G: Boyle Street, what?! Nechies say "what?!"

The crowd: "WHAT?!"

Jazzy-G: Yeah that's what I thought, if you're really coming straight outta E-City.

Jazzy-G sang the word "what?!"—drawn out and rising in inflection—as a slangy exclamation of welcome surprise mingled with skeptical disbelief, used, for instance, when a rhyme, a dance move, or "something" is expressively *cool*. For example, the word works when I praise a student's composition: "you made *that* beat—*what*?!" The remark, at play in Jazzy-G's lyrics, suggests a sense of surprised pride, as if discovering upon stepping up to the microphone or onto the dance floor: "Hey, we *are* pretty good at this! *What*?!" Her song celebrates not only her survival through homelessness, addiction, and personal loss, but also applauds different spaces and skills for *thriving*—hip-hop culture.

The ceremony was peppered with short speeches by government and school board members, and an "official" ribbon cutting ceremony, but the heart of it was the rapping, breakdancing, and musical performance. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs joined in

responding to Jazzy-G's calls, and in her later remarks eloquently thanked the rapper for "sharing your story through your song," and exposing her deepest struggles, hopes, and dreams. The Minister additionally acknowledged the healing abilities of song as a kind of community processes, recognizing the provocative power of rap lyrics which connected to the traditional healing powers of collective stories. She further acknowledged the gifts that were shared in the story of another student, "LiGhTsWiTcH," who had given an emotional keynote address to thank the school for opening new directions for her life. These themes—lyrics as stories, collective cultural narratives, evocation, healing, building respect, struggling, hoping—are touchstones of *The Beat of Boyle Street* music program. During the school's "grand opening," hip-hop performances put the young people of Boyle Street Education Centre into new kind of conversations with federal, provincial, and local government officials, members of the media, families, teachers, peers, and leisure scholars.

The event shifted back and forth between short speeches and performances. Students presented a "runway fashion show" highlighting the work in the school's fashion design program. This production featured an original soundtrack composed by a music program participant. He had crafted his "trance" song across several weeks prior to the event, scrutinizing every detail of every drumbeat, melody, and note. The music composer was called out to take a bow with the models and fashion designers. Following the fashions, a former student (MC "Jellybean") provided a short rap about Aboriginal pride, and Kree-Azn delivered a demonstration of beat boxing, creating complex rhythms and melodies through just his voice, before the breakdancers reclaimed the stage to showcase and share their skills.

The story of this event relates how young people respond when their leisure interests are valued, their views included, and their passions respected—sharing their gifts and giving them back to their communities. Respect and value for young people's leisure interests carries repercussions deep into our individual and collective sense of self and cultural worth. Often viewed negatively in public as dangerous "gangstas" and violent "thugs," the event showcased rappers, B-Boys and B-Girls, and DJs, as the pride, joy, heart, and soul of the school. Through their music, understandings of these young people have been remade anew, not as uncomplicated, trouble-free, squeaky-clean, "positive" examples of "productive" citizens, but rather as complex, creative, struggling, passionate, skillful, and challenging young people.

I, too, have been re-created through the music, never an "innocent," detached, or decontextualized researcher, but complicit in shaping the work at every step, note, and beat. I have a responsibility to "come clean at the hyphen" (or, rather, recognize the manners in which I am always *dirty*) in the spaces where I am co-present, connect, abrade, and share in contouring the stories of the young people in the music program (Dimitriadis, 2001b; Fine, 1998). For instance, throughout the grand opening event I was the "sound man" responsible for the mix and volume in the "public address" system. I have a deep appreciation for these metaphoric descriptions and articulations. No longer just an "old" white researcher in a predominantly Aboriginal youth cultural context, *The Beat of Boyle Street* created spaces for the "remaking" of me as the "sound man," operating a symbolic kind of "public address" system to amplify and support the voices of the young people rapping passionately and dancing furiously to the intensity of the mix of their own music.

In my research with *The Beat of Boyle Street*, remixes of leisure studies, cultural studies, music, and young people's everyday recreational practices challenge leisure scholar-practitioners to reconsider "what leisure is" or "what leisure means," creating spaces for new and different understandings of the complexities and contradictions of leisure practices and leisure studies (Critcher, 2000; Glover, 2003; Mattar, 2003). I have explored different forms of presentation and representation of musical research and creative artistry: remixology, soundscapes, narrative storytelling, autoethnography, and performance. The research included attempts to render the voices of both the young people and the researcher more "visible" [audible] in "the field," representational texts, and performances, and talk about the ways that young people actively use media to reconstruct and remix meaningful musical leisure. In the spirit of the brief prologue in my research proposal—"A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song"—I set out to help young people learn to create, record, and represent their own music through *The Beat of Boyle Street*. In turn, they taught me to hear their songs as powerful, poetic stories about their lives. My study affirms the potential of developing sites of leisure praxis to support and value the experiences, skills, perspectives and differences that young people bring to their recreational musical practices in *The Beat of Boyle Street*, and *The Beat* goes on...

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Appendix: Photos of participants creating and performing in *The Beat of Boyle Street*